



# NEGRO ART IN BELGIAN CONGO

by  
LEON KOCHNITZKY



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# Negro Art in The Belgian Congo

by Leon Kochnitzky



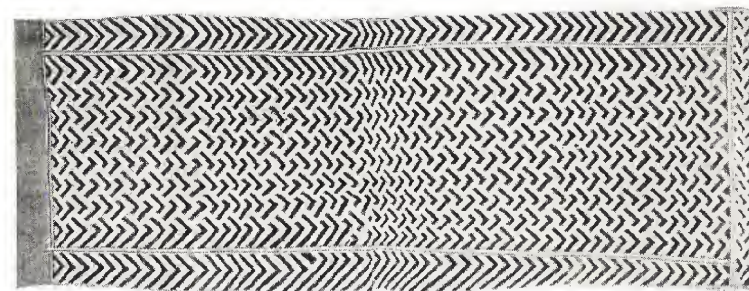
4th revised edition

Published for  
THE BELGIAN CONGO AND RUANDA-URUNDI  
INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE  
3, rue Montoyer Brussels, Belgium

by the  
Belgian Government Information Center  
630 Fifth Avenue New York 20

1 9 5 8

The author, Léon Kochnitzky, studied in his native city, Brussels and in Utrecht. Doctor of Philosophy. University of Bologna, Italy. Received the Prix François Coppée from the Académie Française, 1919. Private secretary to Gabriele d'Annunzio (1919-1920). Published seven volumes of poetry (a French translation of Shakespeare's Sonnets. *Elégies Bruxelloises*, e.a.). Editor of *La Revue Musicale*, Paris. Contributed regularly to the *Osservatore Romano* and to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. Lectured at the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes, New York. In charge of French section of Belgian program of OWI overseas branch from 1942-1946, under the penname of Giraud d'Uccle. In 1951, he made a six-month trip to Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, visiting for several weeks the Bakuba, Bapende and Batshioko tribes. In 1954, he returned to the Congo and Angola. The same year, his poems, *Elégies Congolaises*, inspired by the way of life of both whites and blacks in Belgian Congo, were given an award by the Académie Française. He spent most of the year 1956 in Ceylon, the Portuguese settlements in India and Pakistan. He is now established in Rome.



BAKUBA—Raffia fibre cloth; Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren.

An African work of art is almost isolated from its cultural background. It has to be considered and studied without the help of little-known African history. The social, economic and religious evolution of the Dark Continent throws little light on the real meaning of such work. The only part of human knowledge to which the art historian can have recourse for information is ethnology. This is the chief reason why the study of African art has, for a whole century, been so strongly linked to this science.

Ethnology and aesthetics do not make a happy marriage. The ethnologist is not concerned with the artistic significance of the objects he examines. He cares nothing for the spirit that pervades the statue or the mask he handles; and he remains indifferent to the feeling that inspired the work. Even the technique and the style employed by the artist are of no interest to him, if they do not allow him to ascertain some purely material facts concerning the evolution of culture or the degree of civilization attained by the craftsman.

And yet, during the whole period of discovery of *Africa Tenebrosa*, it was the ethnologist, and not the art scholar, who was the keeper and often the possessor of the treasures discovered by the explorer. Independent research was out of the question. The art scholar, unaware of the treasures that had perhaps been discarded, was forced to enter the museum of the ethnologist, to accept the latter's indoctrination, his classification — in short, the learned man's opinion.



Science is not to be blamed for this astounding state of affairs. On the contrary, we must be grateful to these scientists who saved and preserved from destruction the beautiful relics in which we delight. The positivist and materialistic spirit that pervaded the whole European culture of the XIXth century bears the responsibility for this situation. The general theory of evolution, the belief in everlasting progress, had imposed rigid notions concerning the culture of the so-called primitive peoples. As Carter G. Woodson puts it, up to about fifty years ago, the fetish sculptures, ritualistic masks and carvings of the Africans were laughed at as poor efforts compared with modern art, and the early explorers and travellers in Africa considered these images of persons and things as evidence of backwardness.<sup>(1)</sup>

Nowadays, the art scholar needs more than ever the help of the ethnologist. And the French critic Jean Laude could state in *Cahiers d'Art* (April 1954) that "an aesthetic study of African art must once more be based on the elements gathered by Ethnology."

It must be recognized that the artistic tendencies dominating Europe during the last century share with the scientific authorities the responsibility for the neglect of African art. The efforts towards naturalistic excellence, the desire to come closer to reality and the unceasing fidelity to the Greek canon of art contributed largely in estranging the European artist and the art scholar from the imaginary world of Negro art, where style and symbol were superimposed in the vision of the craftsmen.

A consideration of the European invented word *fetish*, so often applied to African statuettes, illustrates this estrangement.

*Fetish* comes from the Portuguese *feitiço*, a fabricated object, a fake, equivalent to the Latin adjective *factitius* the French *factice*, the Italian *fittizio*. It became popular after the publication of De Brosses's essay *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1750). It corresponds to nothing that exists in Africa. In his *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*, Littré gives the following definition of a fetish: *idole grossière qu'adorent les Nègres* (a coarse idol adored by the Negroes). Now, we know that an African statuette is not an idol, that it is seldom coarse, and that the Negroes do not adore it.

During the XVIIIth century, the passion for exoticism and the exaltation in literary circles of primitive life, of the *bons sauvages* (the good savages) led to the collecting of curiosities gathered

from remote lands. It was but poor treasure-trove, a sort of picturesque bric-à-brac piled up without the slightest discrimination. But the collector's approach was pure, not inspired by a mere desire for information or classification. He aimed at spiritual enjoyment alone. This enjoyment did not spring, as ours does, from the contemplation of a beautiful thing; it proceeded rather from the activity of the imagination, deeply moved at the aspect of the exotic object which acted as a vehicle for flights of fantasy.

Before what we would call the "ethnological age" had come to an end, a certain revival of this taste for exoticism was noticeable in many European countries. The big "world-fairs," so characteristic of XIXth century aspirations, displayed huge geographical models in which African arts and crafts, statues and masks found their place. Objects from the Congo were shown for the first time at the International Exhibition of Antwerp in 1894; others, three years later, at the Exhibition of Brussels. The royal castle of Tervuren, eight miles from the Belgian capital, and the wonderful park surrounding the castle were given up to the Congo Exhibition. Negro villages were built in the park, and the products and objects grouped in the building later formed the nucleus of the Congo Museum collections.

The American scholar Robert J. Goldwater, in his fine book on *Primitivism in Modern Painting*<sup>(2)</sup> has studied the gradual development of the more human understanding of the primitive people's aesthetic values. The scientist, layman, amateur and artist have participated in this evolution, in which explorers and travellers, colonial, military and civil servants likewise played their parts. At the turn of the century, there was considerable change in the ideas of both learned and ignorant alike on the subject of the "Negro fetish."

Suddenly, this evolution was followed by an outburst of enthusiasm, that, in reality, could almost be called a revolution in the appreciation of plastic art. This was in 1905. The artisans of this unexpected discovery of African "things of beauty" were a few young painters living in Paris, and some of their friends — poets and critics.

Today, as James Johnson Sweeney put it, African Negro art no longer represents the mere untutored fumbings of the savage. Nor, on the other hand, do its picturesque or exotic characteristics blind us any longer to its essential plastic seriousness, moving



dramatic qualities, eminent craftsmanship and sensibility to material, as well as to the relationship of material with form and expression, (3).

It was very much in the spirit of negation so characteristic of our days, to state that African art had no impact on Western civilization for the simple reason that it did not exist, and that both artists and critics mistook their own psychic and sentimental representation of Negro objects for a non-existent African Negro Art. On strictly pragmatic ground, this is pure nonsense. During the past forty years, Negro art has brought about one of the most fruitful and representative artistic trends of our age. (4)

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African history is little known; it lacks the continuity and the synchronism that enable us to get the full perspective that we possess of so many ancient civilizations, e.g. the Chinese, the Byzantine and the Inca. But every Mediterranean civilization, at a certain epoch, has endeavored to solve the African mystery. The history of the Nasamonian youths, related by Herodotus (II,32) assumes a symbolic significance. This is how Rawlinson translates it: "Some wild young men, the sons of certain chiefs, when they came to man's estate, indulged in all manner of extravagancies and, among other things, drew lots for five of their number to go and explore the desert places of Lybia and try if they could not penetrate further than any had done previously . . ." The Nasamonian youths, after crossing deserts and swamps for days and days, "were seized by some dwarfish men who led them across extensive marshes, until they finally came to a town, where all men were black-complexioned. A great river flowed by the town, running from West to East . . ."

Whether the river flowing from West to East was the Niger cannot be historically proved, although it seems very probable.

In the VIth century B.C., the Carthaginian fleet, commanded by Hanno, swept along the African coast, probably as far as the island of Fernando Po.

Charles de la Roncière in his splendid *Découverte de l'Afrique au Moyen-Age* (5), tells us how the first information on the great African empires came down to us through the works of Arabic geographers.

Ghana, Manding, Songhai, Mossi and Afno developed considerable power in the Nigerian and Sudanese areas; some of them established dynasties that lasted for many centuries. These African empires can be located on the planispheres and portulans designed by the Jews of Majorca in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries. These cartographers never lost contact with the Jewish communities of Southern Morocco, of the Saharian oasis and the Sudan. Their works, unlike those of the Arabic writers, were not of political or religious inspiration: they were maps and guide-books for the use of caravans and merchants. (6) Jaffuda and Abraham Cresques (d.1387) were among the most famous Majorcan cartographers. The latter was given by the Infante of Aragon the title of *Magister Mappamundarum et Buxolarum*, or master of maps and compasses. Later, another member of the Cresques family was baptized and assumed the name of Gabriel Vallsecha. In 1439, he designed the famous planisphere that came into the possession of Amerigo Vespucci, and which now belongs to the Institute of Catalan Studies in Barcelona. (7)

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The trend of discoveries that led to the new world and to the reconnoitering of the African coasts started from Portugal. The impulse was given by the princes of the Aviz dynasty, above all by the Infante Dom Enrique, surnamed the Navigator.

During the whole of the XVth century, year after year, the world unfolded its mysteries in the wake of Portuguese vessels.

Madeira was discovered in 1419, the Azores in 1432, Cape Bojador in 1434, Senegambia and Cape Verde in 1445; the coast of Guinea and the isles of St. Thomas and Principe were first sighted in 1470.

Spaniards and Flemings vied with the Portuguese in the pursuit of new lands. From 1466, a numerous Flemish colony was established in the Azores. (8)

In 1479 a citizen of Tournai (Hainaut), Eustache de la Fosse, embarked in Cadiz on the Spanish caravella *Mondadina*. The Spanish kings were at war with Portugal. *Et la nuit des Roys, voici quatre navires portugaloises quy vindrent descharger leur artillerie sur moy, par telle fachen qu'ilz nous subjuguèrent . . . je fus mis en la navire d'ung nommé DIOGO CAN, quy estoit un*



*bien rebelle fars* ("and on Twelfth Night 1480," writes Eustache de la Fosse, "four Portuguese ships bombarded my ship and we were forced to surrender. I was taken on board the ship of a certain Diogo Can, who was a ribald scamp.") (9)

Two years later, the same "ribald scamp," Diogo Can, discovered the mouth of the Congo and sailed up the river 110 miles. The following inscription engraved on the cliffs in Vivi (Belgian Congo), was discovered in 1911: *Aqui chegaram os navios do Esclarecido Rey Dom Joao o secundo de Portugal* (here were the ships of the illustrious king of Portugal John II). At the mouth of the Zaïre or Rio Poderoso, as the river was named in those days, Can planted the Padrao, a stone pillar surmounted by a cross. (10)

The evangelization of the Congo began, and the discovery was publicized through the learned world of Europe. A map, drawn between 1488 and 1492 and, according to La Roncière, inspired by Christopher Columbus, indicates the fact that the current of the Rio Poderoso is so powerful as to sweeten the waters of the ocean for about five leagues from the shore. (11) (*Ejus magnitudine atque impetu dulcorare dicitur oppositum mare quinque leucis.*)

For the following two centuries, the realm of the Congo and its Christian rulers were a constant appeal to the religious zeal and proselytism of European Catholics. In 1508, Enrique, son of Afonso, king of the Congo, was sent to Lisbon to study theology. In 1520 he was consecrated Bishop of Utica by Pope Leo X, the first Negro to wear the mitre. The Holy See received ambassadors from and sent legates to the Congo.

Describing the navigation of Vasco de Gama along the African shores, Camoëns naturally alludes to the Christian kingdom:

*Ali o mui grande Reino esta do Congo*  
(*Lusiades* V, 13)

(The greatest realm on these shores is that  
of the Congo.)

The boundaries of this kingdom included only a small part of the present province of Leopoldville, in the modern Belgian Congo. The capital of the ancient realm, San Salvador, and most of its territory, are today a part of Portuguese Angola.

\* \* \*



THE "KING OF THE CONGO"—In the full array of a hero of Racine, the Congo ruler is thus represented in Allain Manesson Mallet's *Description de l'Univers*, published in Paris, 1683.



It is a Portuguese monk, Fra Duarte Lopez, who is our informant concerning this realm of the Congo. In the year 1578, he travelled in Africa. A few years later in Rome, he met the Venetian patrician Filippo Pigafetta, to whom he recounted the story of his travels. This Pigafetta, who was in all probability a descendant of the famous companion of Magellan, Antonio Pigafetta, had taken part in the siege of Paris in 1561, the account of which he published thirty years later. He also was present at the naval battle of Lepanto, 1571. In Rome, 1591, he published the book of Lopez' travels under the title of *Relatione del Reame del Congo et delle circonvicine contrade tratta dalli scritti et ragionamenti di Odoardo Lopez Portoghese* ("description of the kingdom of the Congo and the neighboring countries, from the writings of Odoardo Lopez, a Portuguese.") The book was widely read. French, English, Dutch, German and Latin translations were soon printed. A spirit of religious zeal pervades the whole work. In it, Lopez relates the conversion of the ruler of the Congo realm, in 1491, and the glorious reign of Affonso, his successor (+ 1541), the true champion of the Christian faith. There are relatively few descriptions of people and places. However, in a few pages, Lopez tells us how the king gathered together in the capital — the name of which had been changed to San Salvador — numbers of hideous images of the false gods, which were burnt on a pyre. Pigafetta writes that the "native's belief had been founded on the idea that the more awesome a god was, the more he was to be venerated."

It is sad to think that Lopez was present at the destruction of these statues without having the thought to describe them. But all the same, we owe him a great debt of gratitude for having discovered and described the Cataracts of the lower Congo, 292 years before Stanley. Moreover, the lakes of Equatorial Africa from which the Nile springs are clearly indicated on the maps which illustrate his book. If the XIXth century research scientists had glanced at Pigafetta's book, they would have avoided the many false hypotheses on this subject which have provoked endless discussion.

In Pigafetta's book, the word Congo designates a realm situated on the lower bank of the river, which he calls by the name of Zaïre. It is perhaps owing to his book, so widely read in his time, that the word Congo, later applied to the river, has come down to us.

Although Pigafetta most probably overrated the importance of the evangelization of the Congo realm, it is a historical fact that during the reign of Dom Sebastian, the last king of the house of Aviz, a Christian king of the Congo went to Lisbon and was most solemnly received by the Portuguese monarch. This fact made a deep impression on the popular imagination. It became legendary and, much later, may have been the origin of the strange pageants called the Congadas, that took place once a year in several Brazilian cities, in the XVIIIth century.

During Carnival time, a "royal" procession of African slaves paraded through the narrow streets of old Rio de Janeiro. A King of the Congo, his consort, and heir-apparent (the Makoko) were elected, and in gorgeous array, crowned with gilt diadems, went through the town in fine chariots. They were received by the Viceroy and the Bishop in the public square, where they performed a sort of mystery play. *I am the King of the Congo, I love to dance — I am here, I come from Portugal*; thus sang the king for a day, jigging up and down, followed by his wife and son. Suddenly, a Cabocle (half-breed Indian) approached the Makoko and clubbed him on the head. The young African was felled to the ground and lay as if dead. Sounds of lamentations resounded in the air. The entire royal procession improvised a threnody, mourning the prince and praising his virtues. Then the sorcerers of each tribe appeared on the scene, garbed in their ritual apparel. The colored people of Brazil had not forgotten their origin. From the banks of the great African rivers, they had brought with them their masks, their spears and their matted shields. After magic incantations and passes, the Makoko came to himself, opened his eyes, sprang up and broke into a wild dance in which the king, queen and all the spectators joined. The muffled sound of the tom-tom was heard. Songs were replaced by the howling of the crowd. Lascivious rhythms carried away the captive people, celebrating the resurrection of a flat-nosed, dark-skinned Adonis. The slaves went on dancing the whole night through, forgetful of their endless sufferings.<sup>(12)</sup>

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In 1687, a folio volume of exhaustive information on "the three realms of the Congo, Matamba and Angola" was published in Bologna. It was the work of a Franciscan friar, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, who for many years had been the delegate of the Holy

See in the Portuguese possessions of Western Africa, which he called *Etiopia Inferiore Occidentale*. In these abundantly illustrated 900 pages, Cavazzi minutely analyzes the fauna and flora of the country, giving a picturesque description of such curiosities as the *lamentin* (*il pescedonna*, the woman-fish), the pineapple and the yam (*batata*). He shows a real understanding of the social and political organizations of the Negro realms, and seems very indignant about the heathen rites, the magic superstitions and the worship of idols. His description of music and dances is extremely accurate. All the musical instruments mentioned by him are still to be found in the Congo. <sup>(13)</sup>

It is interesting to follow in the books of Pigafetta and Cavazzi the historical vicissitudes of the African kingdoms. Pigafetta describes in detail the invasion of the Yagas (1568), identified with the present Bayaka tribe. And a great part of Cavazzi's book relates the political wisdom of Djinga Bandi, the Matamba female ruler whom the Italian writer calls "la Regina Ginga." For more than forty years, Ginga, baptized as Anna de Souza, endeavored to play the European invaders one against the other. Spaniards, Portuguese and Dutch sought her alliance.

It was from Angola and the Congo that the New World was to derive its greatest source of slaves. And the expedition of fifteen ships privately organized in Rio de Janeiro, in 1647, by Salvador Correia for the reconquest of Angola, that had been for eight years occupied by the Dutch, can be considered as one of the earliest political interventions of the New World in the affairs of the old.

Portuguese domination, founded on the dire necessities of the slave trade, persisted in Angola. But the Christian kingdom of the Congo was doomed in the beginning of the XVIIIth century, the last European visitors being *Recollets*, Franciscans from Ath (Belgium), as late as 1712. Then, for one hundred and sixty years, oblivion and barbarism fell once more on that part of *Africa Tenebrosa*.

Long before the days of colonization by European powers, Africa's political structures, after a period of relative splendor, weakened and were practically destroyed. It is true that in Africa the white man found fierce foes, such as the Ashantis, the Zulus, the Herreros, Overami of Benin, Samory, Behanzin of Dahomey, the Mahdi, etc. Many of them were not the exponents of a stable political organization, but merely an expression of spontaneous

resistance effected in desperate uprisings against the invaders. Overami or Behanzin, on the other hand, were but the figureheads of states in full decadence, the shadows of what they had been several centuries before the invasion.

Eight out of ten objects we admire in African artistic production were created at least a hundred or even two or three hundred years before European penetration. For some obscure, internal cause, Negro art in the XVIIIth century was already falling into decline. <sup>(14)</sup>

Great as were the errors of the European colonizers in Africa, they must be absolved from one great accusation: that of having destroyed the creativeness of the Negro.

The opinion of this writer is that artistic production decayed at the same time as the deep religious feeling that had animated the artist disappeared. A more sceptical approach to the animistic belief of yore, that inspired the carving of ancestor-statues and ritual masks, provided the decadence of plastic arts in Africa. From this time on, artistic production was limited to decorative and utilitarian purposes. In this sphere it still produces beautiful things. And European administration, especially in Belgian and French colonial territory, both encourages and stimulates the activities of the so-called *arts indigènes*.

The decadence of great African art cannot be refuted. It is comparable — *mutatis mutandis* — to the fate of religious art in Europe, where for more than two hundred years we have not seen an artistic creation inspired by faith that can compare to a medieval cathedral or a masterpiece by Giotto, van der Weyden or Michelangelo.

Thus, the decadence of African art had little or nothing to do with European penetration, and excellent art critics, such as Clive Bell, have struck a false chord when they dramatize the story of "colonial soldiers, enhancing their prestige by pointing out to stay-at-home cousins the relics of a civilization they helped to destroy." <sup>(15)</sup>

Let us illustrate this fact by examples borrowed from two men who greatly contributed to the discovery and the preservation of Negro art.

"In 1906," writes Leo Frobenius, "I visited the Kasai-Sankuru



region in the Belgian Congo. In some villages, the main streets were lined on both sides with palm trees. Each hut was adorned in a different style, a clever, delightful mingling of wood carving and matting. The men carried chiseled weapons in bronze and brass. They were clad in multi-colored stuffs of silk and fibre. Each object, pipe, spoon or bowl was a work of art, comparable in its perfect beauty to the creations of the romanesque period in Europe. I have never heard of any Northern people who could rival these primitive folk in their dignity, exquisite politeness and grace." (16)

Emil Torday, visiting the same region six or seven years later writes: As we came in sight of Misumba, about twenty miles south of the lower Sankuru, it seemed to me that I had entered a new world. It was the most un-African place one could imagine. Stepping out of a lovely grove of palm trees we faced a long street at least thirty feet wide, as straight as an arrow. It was bordered by oblong huts, each standing alone at an equal distance from its neighbors; they were all of the same shape and differed only in their walls, which were made of matwork ornamented with beautiful designs in black. Their conventional patterns varied from house to house . . . Though the day was still hot, the village was as busy as a hive. Everybody was working, the looms of weavers were throbbing, the hammers of smiths clanging: in the middle of the street, where was a shed, men were carving, making mats or baskets and in front of their houses, women were engaged in embroidery. Even the children were bent on some task, some working the smith's bellow, others combing the raffia for the weavers or making themselves generally useful. The whole place was a picture of peaceful activity." (17)

At the time Emil Torday visited this village, Belgian administration had, for six years past, superseded the Congo Free State. And the pastoral way of living, favorable to the preservation of popular craftsmanship, had not been disturbed.

In Africa, as in Europe or the America, industrialization, bringing a higher standard of living, may have fatal consequences for local traditional art. The radio and the movies may be of still greater danger to the survival of the *arts indigènes* than were the weapons of the white Conquistador.

During the last years, a serious attempt has been made by ecclesiastical authorities in the Congo to direct the trends of the *arts indigènes* towards Christian religious art. The decoration of

the churches and the carving of sacred images are now mostly executed by natives, following their antique patterns. Only members of the church can fully appreciate the result of this activity. The former Apostolic Delegate in the Congo, Msgr. G. Dellepiane, had given his strongest encouragement to this initiative. In June 1936, the first exhibition of Congolese religious art was held in Leopoldville.

Full achievement will only be measured after one or two generations of artists have shown us what they can do. Meanwhile, we can agree with the wishful thinking of a French writer, M. Henri Menjaud: "If Negro art is destined to perish with the superstition that inspired it and that our civilization is forced to destroy, Christian faith can bring it to life again." (18)

## II

*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.* This was Moses' commandment to his people, as they fled from the land of Egypt, this African land where the worship of graven images was rife.

More than Europe and Asia, even more than the pre-Columbian Americas, Africa is traditionally a maker of graven images. To peoples to whom the art of writing was as yet unknown, form was the only means of preserving human thought beyond the limit of man's memory. And form became dogma, history, tradition. It would be an error however, to imagine that every figure in Negro art is a substitute for a written document.

It has often been said that Negro art was an expression of religion. But the relationship between the African worshipper and the image is very different from the attitude of the heathen in the presence of his visible god. What we commonly call an idol has never existed in Africa. What an African statue or mask represents is never a god.

The theogony of most of the Bantu tribes recognizes a sole God who ordains the universe. (1) He created the *genii*, heroic beings whose mission it was to model the visible world. This Master of the universe, indifferent to the fate of his own creation, is moved neither by prayer nor by offerings, no Negro ever thought of imprisoning his aloof and far-off divinity in any form or image. (2)

The *genii*, on the contrary, who unlike the Creator were

animated by the spirit of evil and good, could be and were propitiated.

Closer still to human beings are the dead, whose dynamic spirit keeps its personality after death. The living are surrounded by the active spirits of the dead, their kindred, their ancestors, their chiefs and both the friends and foes of the tribe. The goal of ethic life is to strengthen the bonds of solidarity between the living and the dead.<sup>(3)</sup> It is thus that the ceremonial which surrounds entry into the virile age (at which period the rites of circumcision are performed) marks the crucial moment when indissoluble ties are established between the coming generation and their forefathers.

These rites are still surrounded with the greatest secrecy. The initiated are forbidden to reveal anything concerning the practices, and their attitude towards all secret ceremonies is akin in spirit to that of Romans and Greeks towards their Mysteries. It has taken years of patient investigation to penetrate a part of the Negro Mysteries.

The ceremonies of the entry into the virile age differ from one tribe to another. But all these rites, as well as the spirit that pervades them, spring more or less from the same source. The initiation consists in segregation of the young men from the rest of the community. In the BAKONGO tribe, the period of initiation, the *Longo*, takes from two to four months<sup>(4)</sup>. In the BAPENDE tribe, when the time is chosen for the *Nkanda* (the circumcision), the sorcerer, masked and garbed in a special gown of fibre, enters the village where the children are presented by their fathers. The women, informed of the arrival of the officiant, have fled to the forest, whence they will not return during the period of seclusion of the youths. The circumcised boys remain in the quarters prepared for them until the wound is completely healed. They can eat food prepared by men only. When they leave the *Mukanda* (*Mu Nkanda*, the house of circumcision), a great feast is held, with dances, songs and music in which the whole community (men and women) participates.<sup>(5)</sup>

The *Nkanda* comprises a moral preparation, the young boys being taught a code of ethics and the essentials of jungle etiquette (between the age of five and eight, the boys have already received preparatory teaching on these matters, that goes on for nine days). Now, before being circumcised, they must pass through

a series of ordeals meant to teach them to fear neither wild beasts nor foes, fire, water nor ghosts.<sup>(6)</sup> In all these mysterious and complicated exercises, the mask plays an essential part.

After a month of seclusion, when the youths undergo their first ordeal, they are obliged to walk through a prepared ditch, about ten feet deep, lined on both sides with niches, in which they are confronted with awesome sights: men wearing leopard skins and terrifying masks; others, waving red hot irons before their eyes. All of a sudden, the candidate stumbles into an unseen pool. Three series of such ordeals take place during the *Nkanda* period.

All these ceremonies correspond, according to Maes<sup>(7)</sup>, to a belief in the incarnation of a spirit, of a vital power in the youth at the time of virility. To express this incarnation of a new spirit of life, the child is taken away from his family during the period of circumcision. He disappears from his natural surroundings. The candidate for initiation paints his skin with a thick layer of *Mpembe*, a sort of white clay. Among the BAPENDE, the candidates wear a comb-mask, stuck upside-down in the hair. It is made of copper or wood, is semi-transparent and is probably derived from the masks of other tribes. During the *Nkanda*, the newly circumcised youths reject their childish names, assuming new ones on their return to the village.

In many cases, writes Maes<sup>(8)</sup>, we have found that the mask was but a part of the full dress used during the ceremonies and ordeals of the circumcision by the officiant or by the candidates.

These masks assume most varied aspects according to their antiquity or to the tradition of the single tribes. We know, for instance, that all specimens adorned with cauries (a tiny shell, *Cyprea Moneta*) are of relatively recent fabrication, the caury, that served as a medium of exchange, not having been used in regions remote from the coast, such as the Kasai-Sankuru, before the second half of the XIXth century.

Other masks take the form of the stylized head of a jungle animal: leopard, buffalo, elephant or gnu (a kind of huge antelope).

A curious specimen is the mask called *Bombo*. It was used in ancient days by the BAKUBA. It is a huge helmet shaped like a human head; the nose is very big, the chin lengthened by an



appendix representing a beard, the eyes are small — but the most characteristic feature of this mask is the enormous, bulging forehead. The ethnologists consider the *Bombo* as “negrillomorphic,” that is to say, the stylization of the Negrillo’s head. Today Pygmies are only to be found in the Equatorial Forest. Two hundred years ago, they were still heard of near the West coast.<sup>(9)</sup> The land, writes George Hardy<sup>(10)</sup>, was considered to be the inalienable property of its first possessors, the Pygmies. In the minds of the Bantu invaders, these aborigines had been changed into earthly genii, somewhat comparable to the Germanic Niebelungen. Hence the part played by the *Bombo* mask in the mysteries of the initiation.

With the passing of centuries, the mask has, in certain cases, lost its religious character, becoming a military accessory or even a dance ornament. In fact, any attempt to classify the African masks is vague and delusive. We can catalogue them only according to their local origin. This has been done very accurately by Joseph Maes.<sup>(11)</sup> But a scientific classification of this kind does not bring us closer to an aesthetic judgment, or to an artistic appreciation.

Why are African masks — especially those carved many centuries ago in Gabun, the French Ivory Coast and the Belgian Congo — so impressive that they provoke in the onlooker an unforgettable emotion? In none of them do we find a desire to portray the human being, dead or alive. They are not distorted portraits, neither are they pure abstraction. Each of them bears a resemblance to a human or animal type, but the likeness is merely an allusion, sometimes an illusion. In making a mask, the sculptor cannot go very far from the natural size, for the mask is generally intended to be worn.<sup>(12)</sup>

As Roger Fry puts it, “there is no doubt that the mask creates in us the idea of a human spirit, though one the like of which we have never seen.”<sup>(13)</sup> The sense of overwhelming panic that pervades us in the presence of these objects has little to do with any information that has been handed down to us by the ethnologists. What was the aim of the sculptor, with what sort of feeling (terror, love, hatred, mourning or contemplation), did he accomplish his work? All that we have been told by the investigations of these learned men concerning ancestor worship, propitiation of the dead, rites of initiation, etc., cannot answer

these simple questions. The spirit that animated the primitive sculptor has died away without betraying its secret. Neither can we imagine the feeling that stirred the mask-bearer (was he himself afraid while trying to frighten his fellowman, or did he consider himself a religious intercessor, when he assumed a new aspect in order to protect and safeguard his people?) Still greater is our inability to realize the impression produced on the community at the sudden appearance of this terrifying image.

*Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor . . .* (STATIUS)  
(Fear was first to create Gods in the world)

Although the African mask was by no means a fetish, neither was it an image of a god; it was born in fear, and in fear it has existed for centuries. Fear of the genii, fear of the forces of nature, fear of the dead, of wild animals in jungle ambush, and of their vengeance after they were killed by the hunter; fear of one’s fellowman who kills, rapes and even devours his victims . . . and, above all: fear of the unknown, of all that precedes and follows the short life of man. This essential terror confronts us — in the same degree as it did the primitives — with the fundamental mystery of mankind: what are we, where do we come from and where are we going?

Some masks (especially those carved in a later period with more or less skill by sceptical craftsmen), are little more to us than picturesque puppets, interesting in their exoticism and strangeness. Many others reflect the metaphysical pangs of the human race. Their mysterious shapes, carved by “savages” some two or three centuries ago, retain in the eyes of the “civilized” onlooker all their transcendental grandeur. Art of the past and present has no higher goal than this direct appeal to life’s mystery. For this very reason, the beauty of the best African masks exists forever, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

*Eine fixierte Ekstase* (the fixation of an ecstasy) — in 1915, the German art historian Carl Einstein (who in 1943 chose suicide when trapped on the Spanish border by Gestapo agents), gave this perfect definition of the African mask.<sup>(14)</sup> The incitement towards ecstasy through fear, adoration or worship can be considered the original cause, not only of the existence of masks, but of all Negro art. This opinion, however, is not accepted by all. According to Father Aupiais, a learned French missionary, three sources of African art can be traced: first, the use of metaphor in the language, which would tend to assimilate the work of art

to a poem; second, a desire to record history; and third, the creation of fictive personages by means of alteration.

Assuredly, the desire to record history has played a very great part in the creation of sculptured objects among the tribes that had a settled political organization. The tattooings that are so general among the Bantus are, in fact, records of their ancestry, their station in life and their affiliation with secret societies. These tattooings are in reality cicatrizations of wounds. The design is cut into the skin and the wounds treated so as to raise scarred ridges above the surface.

The staves of chiefs carved minutely into designs that symbolize the chief's genealogy and accomplishments are part of similar records.

The most striking examples of these "history books in relief" are the two carved thrones of the BATSHIOKO chiefs now at Tervuren. Around the more recent of the two, scenes of pastoral and tribal life unfold their pageantry: the domestication of the buffalo, the cultivation of the cassava plant, the ceremonies of the circumcision and finally the arrival of the white people in the jungle.

Historical recording may have been a source of inspiration to the native artist, but it is less frequently met with than the ritual and religious inspiration. The poetical metaphor is but a form of these ritual practices. What we have said concerning the masks justifies the spirit of alteration noted by Father Aupiais, but does not necessarily imply the creation of fictive personages. We are more inclined to agree with the opinion of the late Paul Guillaume, who, as a pioneer among art dealers, was the first to draw our attention to the beauty of African art. He wrote: "the partly human face may well be the bridge which leads the observer from his every-day attitude to the awed contemplation of the supernatural." (15)

\* \* \*

The art of the sculptor has been and still is of an extreme importance among the two ethnic groups, BAKUBA and BALUBA, whose artistic production has the greatest significance. Joseph Maes relates that the privilege of being a sculptor is not given to all. In the Katanga, only members of the aristocracy have the right to carve the objects and insignia of dignity. They alone may wear on their shoulder the ornamental hatchet, the emblem of their high station in life. The BALUBA sculptor must go through a

long and difficult apprenticeship in the school of a reputed master ere he can attain his goal. To be admitted to this school, the candidate must show a serious disposition for carving and prove a particular skill. (16)

According to Father Colle, each BALUBA village of five hundred inhabitants possesses at least one or two sculptors who carve wood and ivory. The art tradition of the BALUBA is similar to that practiced by BAKETE and BENA LULUBA sculptors. (17)

Even now, among the BAPENDE, mask sculptors are kept very busy in producing the dance masks of their tribe. (18) The present writer saw the sculptor Kalunga at work, in the village of Munga, near Kilembe (Kwango). He was helped by six assistants and the entrance of the small garden which he used as a studio was strictly prohibited to women. In another village of the same region, an elderly ivory carver named Kabamba devoted himself exclusively to the making of tiny amulets that are worn suspended on a string round the neck.

It would be an error to imagine these sculptors working in the fashion of European or American artists. They belong to a culture where things can be superlatively beautiful and utilitarian at the same time. (19) Every utensil is material for decoration: (20) cups and goblets carved in the shape of human heads or ornamented with geometrical patterns; chief-staves and chairs adorned with historical scenes; headrests and stools supported by sculptured figures; make-up boxes and spoons, bobbins: musical instruments, drums and tom-toms that were used in the jungle to transmit news from village to village by a process very similar to the Morse code.

These are some of the objects made by the Negro artisans. Besides these, there are amulets and talismans chiseled in wood or ivory, and minor objects used in magic practices; some of these, employed by the witch doctor to detect the seat of a disease, are shaped like animals and skillfully carved. Perhaps we should also consider the so-called "nailed-fetishes." They are found in the region of the lower Congo. But they are generally of a very poor quality and from a purely aesthetic point of view have little interest.

The reader might ask how we can reconcile the existence of such objects with the statement that "what we commonly call a fetish does not exist in Africa." The answer is very simple: these things are either medical instruments or else have some other im-



mediate practical function (protection of the crops, removal of evil influence, etc.). Even the "nailed-fetish" is not considered as a god nor worshipped at such.

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Negro art has not been produced in the same abundance in all regions of the Belgian Congo. It was largely the tribes in the southern and western parts of the country who created the beautiful works that have come down to us.

In his outstanding work, *Plastiek van Kongo* (Antwerp 1946), Frans M. Olbrechts has named four different artistic regions: Lower Congo, Bakuba, Baluba, and the northern part of Belgian Congo divided in Northwest and Northeast regions. This classification appears to be logical, and we shall quote Mr. Goldwater's remark that "continual movements of peoples make the determination of influences and origins difficult as does the uncertainty of provenance of objects." (21)

Glory is capricious towards nations as well as towards individuals. Among the diverse cultures that blossomed through the ages in tropical Africa, the BUSHONGO culture alone has had the privilege of keeping its own records and transmitting them almost intact to modern research.

Both oral tradition and chance played a part in the rescue of these records. For many centuries, a high dignitary of the BUSHONGO court, the *Moaridi*, has been an official historian, a kind of living handbook, who preserved in his prodigious memory the history of the hundred and twenty *Nyimis*, the political and religious chiefs of the nation. But all the skill of the *Moaridis* and their disciples was not enough to bring us the account of their history. Chance, in this case, was incarnated in a man, Emil Torday (1875-1931), a Hungarian ethnologist who spent several years in the region of the Sankuru-Kasai basin, won the friendship of the natives, learned their language and discovered the hidden marvels of their art. What Garcilaso de la Vega did for the Inca civilization in the XVIth century, Torday renewed in the beginning of the XXth century for the BUSHONGO culture. He had been sent to Africa to discover and bring back objects of interest to the British Museum. This he performed with the greatest success. Not only did he find the most splendid artistic production of Central Africa, but he wrote, in collaboration with a British Museum ethnologist, T. A. Joyce, an exhaustive ethno-

logical study describing the people he had lived with for years. (22) Moreover, Emil Torday left us a charming book, containing his personal recollections, recounting the story of his discoveries and telling how he persuaded the native king and his council to give up some of their most precious sculptures to the British Museum. (23)

Nowadays, the BUSHONGO are called BAKUBA by the surrounding tribes. Travellers, tourists and art students generally use the same appellation, BAKUBA to describe the peoples living along the pattern of BUSHONGO culture, and not only the original BUSHONGO clans.

In Mushenge, the present capital, situated in the Sankuru-Kasai region, lives the *Nyimi*, the sovereign of divine origin, surrounded by a crowd of officials and ministers whose functions are as strictly ritualized as were those of the Byzantine court. One of them is the *Moaridi*, whom we have already mentioned; another is the *Nyibina*, the head of the sculptors of graven images, who occupies an exalted position at court.

The history of the BUSHONGO nation is most fascinating. After relating the origin of the world and creation, achieved by a unique God, the narrator proceeds to recount the deeds and records of his people: The BUSHONGO came from the shores of a great sea (probably Lake Tchad). (A) Before they could settle on their present land, they had to cross four large rivers (the Ubangui, the Congo, the Bassiri and the Lukenye). (24)

Each reign is described with its characteristic events. Under the 98th *Nyimi*, a total eclipse of the sun is recorded. This enabled Torday to fix a landmark in BUSHONGO history. A total eclipse, visible in that part of the world, had been recorded by European observatories on March 30, 1680. Today's computation of dates is entirely based on this event. At 1500 or thereabouts, he fixes the reign of Miele, a famous blacksmith who introduced the use of iron among his people. Shamba Bolongongo, the 93rd *Nyimi* (circa 1600) is remembered as the greatest and wisest of all the BUSHONGO rulers. To acquire wisdom, he wandered among

(A) The deductions of Torday are no longer admitted by the new generation of ethnologists. According to them, the BAKUBA kingdom appears to have been founded by BAKONGO conquerors that came from the North-east. They subdued ethnic elements of disparate origin, whose influence was deeply felt in their later development.

the neighboring tribes for many years, like the young Buddha. When he assumed power, he introduced several political, social and moral reforms that have been religiously kept by his successors. He reorganized his court, giving an important place to the representatives of the most honored crafts. He taught his subjects the weaving of cloth from raffia fibre. He was a peaceful sovereign, and he prohibited the use of the *shongo* ("the lightning"), the throwing-knife that is still in use among the tribes of the Ubangui and Tchad regions. This throwing-knife had been the traditional weapon of the BUSHONGO (the men with the *shongo*). Shamba Bolongongo also instituted the custom of carving a wooden image of the ruler. This Solomon of the jungle used to say: *Kill neither man, woman nor child. Are they not the children of Chembe (God), and have they not the right to live?* Shamba likewise brought to his people some of the agreeable passions that alleviate the tediousness of life: the use of tobacco and the game of *Lela*, a sort of draughts, still very popular in most African countries.

Torday, after having gained the *Nyimi's* friendship, was admitted to the royal house, where he saw the statues of Shamba and his successors. One of the most recent was the image of Mikope Mbulu, who had reigned in the beginning of the XIXth century: in 1908, a daughter of this chief was still alive, a very old woman, who told Torday how her father had abolished the law that prevented kings and noblemen from marrying slave girls. Mikope himself had married a slave and at the foot of his statue, a small feminine figure represented the woman he had loved above everything on earth.<sup>(25)</sup> Torday also tells us of the long series of intrigues which took place between the *Nyimi* and the grandees before they could make up their minds that the image of their former rulers would have a more secure and more illustrious abode in the British Museum than they had in the fragile shelters of Mushenge.

Not all the statues seen by Torday were taken from their legitimate possessors for the enjoyment of white scholars and artists. Seven of them belong now to European museums. Three of them, including the image of Shamba Bolongongo, are in the British Museum; three more are in the Royal Museum of the Belgian Congo, in Tervuren, and one in the National Museum of Copenhagen. Still another belongs to the family of the late Mr.

Renkin, first Belgian Minister of Colonies. Ten more are listed by Prof. Olbrechts, all of them belonging to Belgian private collectors. Seventeen of these eighteen statues were exhibited in Antwerp in December 1937 and are reproduced in *Palstiek van Kongo*. The names of twelve of the BAKUBA rulers represented are known. Three or four of the remaining statues represent, according to Olbrechts, the same unidentified ruler.<sup>(26)</sup>

Although these statues belong to very different periods, they are similar both in attitude and stylization. The BAKUBA rulers are seated on their haunches, with the emblem of their reign in front of them (anvil, table of the *Lela*, etc.)<sup>(27)</sup> On their bodies we see belts of fibre and shoulder, arm and wrist bracelets of threaded beads. The disproportion that we find between the upper and lower parts of the body, characteristic of Negro statues, is still more striking in these exquisite works of art because of their very perfection.

This curious angle of vision, which is so general, can be explained by the fact that the artist, when carving his subjects, works seated on the ground, and therefore sees the log he is carving with that particular aspect which modern painters of our time call *perspective descendante*. These statues, being designed to be placed directly on the soil and not on a socle, present themselves in the same manner to the spectator.

It is generally admitted that the statues of the BUSHONGO kings represent the highest peak of Negro art. We find, especially in the image of Shamba, harmonious synthesis between style and reality, idealization and resemblance, expression and technique.

These statues are of rather small dimensions. The biggest is slightly less than three feet high. However they are not mere portraits; neither are they statuettes of a personal nature like so many other Negro works, equivalent to the Roman *lares*. They are veritable monuments, invested with a civil and lay significance. We may say that they are official portraits, tending to inspire civic feelings in the onlooker and to increase the glory of the rulers.

For all these reasons, and despite the extraordinary skill of the carvers and the material perfection attained, these famous statues of the BUSHONGO kings are not the most striking examples of Negro art. Their inspiration derives from hero-worship, a feeling we know all too well in European art, and the fact



that their creators were also courtiers, officially appointed sculptors, heirs and depositories of a tradition handed down through hundreds of years, invests them with an unavoidable academic character.

Academism in Negro art? The expression may seem strange. But it also corresponds to a strange reality. As Torday puts it: "The BUSHONGO form a wedge driven into a solid mass of people who by whatever name they may be called, belong to the Tuba family."<sup>(28)</sup> Now, if we compare any production of BAKUBA art to a similar creation of the BALUBA or any other tribe of the Belgian Congo, we can easily establish, on a purely aesthetic ground, some essential differences in the spirit that pervades these works. The statues of the BUSHONGO kings represent the achievements of a delicate technique. Only a well-established artistic tradition could produce these masterpieces. The men who created them were professional artists, in the European sense of the word. This appears also when we examine the other BAKUBA statues, their decorative production (bowls, carved boxes, instruments of magic therapeutics, drums, woven materials), which Mr. Olbrechts assigns to a popular BAKUBA style, distinct from the court style which inspired the king statues, and also their masks. All expressionism is banned from BAKUBA art.

An exquisite sense of style and decorative art inspired the linear patterns transported from the woven tapestries of raffia fibre to the carved surface of goblets and boxes. These patterns, writes Paul Guillaume,<sup>(29)</sup> highly conventional and geometrical, are handed down through the generations and designated by particular names. BUSHONGO children are taught at an early age to make them with thumb and finger in the sand. Some of them take their shape from animals, others from basketwork, showing the plaiting of straw, over and under. Other elements borrowed from the vegetable, animal or astronomical world are also frequently employed by the BAKUBA carvers. The moon and the sun, the palm-leaf, the snake, the antelope, the leopard and the crocodile are represented in a more or less stylized form.

The so-called head-cups are another remarkable feature of BAKUBA art. Whatever may have been the symbolic significance of these strange wooden goblets in form of a human head, they constitute a characteristic achievement of the BAKUBA carvers. A great variety of style is to be found in the rendering of the

human face. Sometimes, we are confronted with a mysterious, hieratic, almost superhuman expression, while in other examples, the features are so vivid and realistic as to suggest that the intention of the sculptor was to create a real portrait of a given human being.

A detail, often reproduced on drums and goblets, is the human hand. Joseph Maes has given an interesting interpretation of this symbol.<sup>(30)</sup> The BAKUBA warrior, before becoming a member of the caste of Yolo, had to show his courage and valor by killing an enemy of the tribe. To prove his exploit, he had to present to the council of this high military clan the left hand of the doomed enemy, which was solemnly burned on a pyre during the ceremony of admission. It may be that the carver commemorated this event by reproducing the cut-off hand on an object which was awarded on this occasion to the new Yolo.

This emblem of blood and murder is exceptional in the decorative art of the BAKUBA. As a matter of fact, all scholars agree in praising the peaceful and intimate character of BUSHONGO art, its natural grace and innate style. Even in their masks, the BAKUBA artists strove to avoid the awesome and fearful impression produced by so many other African masks. We also know that their masks were not — or in any case, are no longer — exclusively reserved for ritualistic ceremonies. Some are worn by itinerant clowns, some by dancers. Joseph Maes observes that the BAKUBA masks have probably lost their ancient meaning — the inevitable consequence of the decadence of ancestral customs. He adds that such "decay of masks," such an evolution in the mask's role and significance are to be found among the BAKUBA.<sup>(31)</sup> This confirms what BAKUBA art has taught us of its aesthetic character, its highly developed sense of decorative splendor and also its tepid approach to the things of religion and ancestor worship.

The *Nyimi's* prime minister once implored Torday to use his influence with the king in persuading him to re-establish the rites of initiation. On another occasion, the same dignitary complained that the ancient language which was formerly understood and spoken by the BUSHONGO aristocracy had fallen into disuse. Alluding to the difficult political situation of the *Nyimi* and his government, the prime minister informed Torday that the disaster he dreaded was not the collapse of his country . . . but the

destruction of its spiritual world, which, in his eyes, was the only thing that mattered. <sup>(32)</sup>

This demonstrates that the BAKUBA culture, the most developed and refined in Central Africa, was losing its original attachment to tradition and to faith long before the days of European penetration. In BAKUBA art, more national than religious, more aristocratic than popular, not a free art, but one attached to imprescriptible canons, this state of things is accurately mirrored. Compared to the artistic production of less politically developed tribes, BAKUBA art appears, for all its splendor, frigid and distant. Mr. Alain Locke finds in a BAKUBA head-cup the quality of austerity and mystic restraint of early Buddhist works. <sup>(33)</sup> As a matter of fact, the BAKUBA have carefully preserved their wonderful technique, and its "academism" is a solid guarantee of the survival and perhaps even of a possible Renaissance of what has been called the "BUSHONGO miracle." <sup>(34)</sup>

Two events, which have taken place within sixty years of each other, illuminate the astounding historical adventure of the BUSHONGO kingdom.

Torday, after explaining how the *Nyimi* generally chooses his successor among the sons of his sisters (matrilinear succession), tells us that as soon as the king had passed away, the government was, for the time being, in the hands of the late king's oldest son, who acted as a *Camerlengo*. One of his principal duties was to guard the royal treasures, and another to choose the victims to be immolated on his father's grave. Then followed a reign of terror, a hunt for those who were to die. This lasted during the three days the body remained exposed. When old Bope Mobinji (in whose time, in 1884, Dr. Wolf came to the country's frontier) died, his son had two thousand people killed in his honor without counting the wives and slaves buried with him . . . very probably an exaggeration. <sup>(35)</sup>

In his beautiful book, *Congo*, published in New York in 1945, with fine photos by André Cauvin, the young American poet John Latouche, whose untimely death was deeply lamented by his many friends in U. S. A., Belgium and the Congo, has given us an interesting report of the incumbent *Nyimi's* activity. The present king owns many antique statues, masks, and cloths, which have been partially destroyed by the native habit of storing those objects in huts, where they are at the mercy of termites, mold and weather.

Encouraged by the government, the king, after years of persuasion, was erecting a large brick museum in which to house his treasures. He was also instructed in the art of preventing natural hazards from still further impairing relics of such value. <sup>(36)</sup>

The present writer visited Mushenge in February, 1951. The museum is a brick construction, the only one to be found in the *Nyimi's* capital. There, on three large display tables are shown ancient cups with geometrical patterns and carved boxes (those in the shape of a half-moon are particularly beautiful). No BAKUBA statue is to be seen in the museum, although the *Nyimi* still possesses several ancient sculptures, not exposed to the public. Along the walls, a series of BAKUBA masks are displayed, together with high carved drums. This museum, furnished and controlled by the natives themselves, is the first of its kind ever built in Africa.

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The BALUBA constitute an important ethnic group whose separate tribes are to be found in vast regions in the South of the Belgian Congo, from the Kasai-Sankuru valleys up to the shores of Lake Tanganyika (the Urua or Warua being but a geographical denomination of diverse tribes under BALUBA influence, as those which Mr. Verhulpen, in his work on BALUBA culture, calls *Balubaisés*). The history of this culture is little known, although the artistic production of the BALUBA is one of the most important of the African continent. But little by little, the material facts of BALUBA history are revealed to the patient investigators. Mr. Verhulpen <sup>(37)</sup> recounts the successive rise and decline of two BALUBA empires, the first founded in the region of the Lomami by Kongolo, a conqueror of BASONGE origin who, after extending and increasing his possessions, had the miserable ending that befalls black as well as white conquerors. This took place in the beginning of the XVIth century.

The dynasty of Mbili Kilube (Kongolo's father) continued to reign over the second BALUBA empire, which extended its frontiers from the Tanganyika and Moero lakes to the upper course of the Lualaba (Congo) and the Lomami.

His patient researches, pursued in the encampments where he lead the elders to speak of their ancestors, permitted Verhulpen to establish a chronological list of the BALUBA rulers. He also made comparative lists of the chiefs of the BALUBA dynasty with



the dynasty of the Christian kings of the Congo, (A) and with the much talked of and little-known dynasties of the LUNDA kingdoms, that is to say, little-known to English, French or German speaking peoples, but not strangers to the Portuguese. These intrepid pioneers have never ceased their penetration of the unknown continent, from their Angola bases on the African coast, striving to connect their Indian Ocean possessions with those on the Atlantic.

Both explorers and merchants proceeded symmetrically — one could say — to the famous *Bandeirantes*, the Brazilian pioneers who, from Santos and Sao Paulo penetrated the tropical jungle, the *sertao*.

Lacerda, the *Pombeiros* or native-traffickers (1806-1811), Monteiro and Gamitto, Silva Porto, Serpa Pinto, Henrique Dias de Carvalho, between 1798 and 1885, organized several expeditions all of which crossed through the LUNDA kingdoms. In the description they give of the court of the *Cazembe*, the ruler of a kingdom which was to a certain extent a vassal of the LUNDA empire, Monteiro and Gamitto relate that they were received, in November 1831, by the *Cazembe*, seated on a throne placed between two parallel rows of half-length figures of human beings with horned heads. Another smaller image was placed in a wicker basket at the chief's feet<sup>(38)</sup>

But the real seat of the LUNDA state was the residence of the *Muata-Yanvo*, whose dynasty, allied to the BALUBA rulers, began to expand in the beginning of the XVIIth century (the first *Muata-Yanvo* being a contemporary of Shamba Bolongongo, the wise BUSHONGO sovereign).

In Mr. Verhulpen's learned work, we see coordinated for the first time the scattered historical developments of Central African nations. Thus, year after year, the clouds are lifted, and we have a glimpse of the *Africa Tenebrosa* of yore.

It is highly regrettable, however, that Mr. Verhulpen, who describes so minutely the memories and customs of the BALUBA, has omitted any mention of visible objects.<sup>(39)</sup> And yet what a

(A) He gives us a list of about thirty successive monarchs bearing Portuguese names such as Joao, Alvaro or Antonio, that reigned in San Salvador from 1491 to 1710. The beginnings of this epoch (1491-1541) have been studied intensively in Msgr. Cuvelier's excellent book, *L'Ancien Royaume de Congo*, Brussels, 1946.

profusion of these objects there were! Statues and masks, carved implements and goblets and the famous stools supported by human figures! These works do not attain the material perfection that enchants us in BAKUBA art. The BALUBA craft is more rudimentary and less ornamental. It has a kind of stylistic soberness, a moderation in the decorative details. But when it endeavors to represent human beings, it attains a high emotional intensity, a powerful and dramatic expression.

If we wish to make a comparison in terms familiar to every art student, we should say that a BALUBA statue is to a BAKUBA what a Tuscan fresco of the XIVth century is to a Florentine painting of the late *quattrocento*.

One of the themes frequently treated by the BALUBA sculptor is the so-called *mendiant* figure, a kneeling woman holding a large bowl, as if she were begging for alms. The most famous of the many statues of this kind, at the Tervuren Museum, is a touching achievement of BALUBA art. The pathetic face of the elderly woman is sculpted in plane surfaces and despite the skillful stylization, it shows a deep feeling of humanity. The emaciated limbs contribute to the general impression of suffering and despair. The tragic figure, has been subject to various interpretations on part of ethnologists. It was first considered as the figure of a mourner; then it was thought to be a *Kabila ka Vilié*, a daughter of the spirit, a protective image of maternity. We were told that during the last days before childbirth, the statue was placed on the threshold, the passers-by dropping their obol in the bowl held by the *Kabila*, in token of good wishes for both mother and child.<sup>(40)</sup> According to Dr. Waldecker, assistant curator of the *Musée Léopold II* in Elisabethville, the *mendiant* is really an instrument used in divinatory art. The bowl filled with beads and kaolin powder was shaken by the faithful and the witchdoctor interpreted the response of the oracle.<sup>(41)</sup>

In Yorubaland, hundreds of miles away from the country inhabited by the BALUBA, similar statues are found, with exactly the same artistic characteristics. Such simultaneous representations in lands remote from each other, peopled by totally different tribes, are a frequent and mysterious phenomenon of African Negro art.

Prof. Olbrechts has established that the famous Tervuren statue is not a unique specimen of its style and perfection. In

European museums and private collections, he has identified at least nine more plastic works (eight caryatide stools and one standing male figure) that bear somatic, technical and aesthetic resemblance to the Tervuren *Kabila*. He has ascribed them, if not to a single artist, at least to a particular school or workshop and has distinguished them from all other BALUBA production under the denomination of LONG-FACE BULI STYLE, after the village of Buli on the river Lualaba, where the Tervuren statue and one of the caryatide stools were found. All the other specimens of the same style, and many more that bear influences of the LONG-FACE technique, come from the same Urua or Warua region, between the Lualaba (Congo) and Lake Tanganyika.

The crouching figure supporting a stool or a head-rest is a favorite theme of BALUBA sculpture. The stool is an emblem of power, used by the mighty on solemn occasions. Some of these stools are conceived along purely decorative lines, and bear no figurative element; an admirable specimen of this type can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum.

The stool supported by one or more human figure is a very characteristic feature of BALUBA art. The concept of chastisement, the affirmation of might and power, were the primitive inspirations of the subject, psychologically akin to that of the Greek Caryatides. A similar intention can be traced in the sculptures of Gothic cathedrals, where the figures supporting archways or entablatures are mostly demons, dragons, grotesque and diabolical faces, but never angels or holy creatures.

In Central African cultures, it is a kingly prerogative to sit on a living throne, on the back of a slave. The *Nyimi* of the BUSHONGO, in stately ceremonies, still places a foot on the body of a prostrate servant. And Cavazzi, in the middle of the XVIIth century, gave us a charming description of the visit that Queen Djinga Bandi of Matamba paid to the Portuguese governor of Angola. <sup>(42)</sup> During the audience, one of the Queen's maids in attendance, squatting on the floor, *le servi di sgabello* (served as a stool) to Her Majesty. In our opinion, it is more than probable that the BALUBA stools supported by carved figures of men or women are but an artistic elaboration of this symbolical gesture.

BALUBA art is animated by romantic transport. The masks bear visible traces of such a spirit, which we find also in carved ivory charms in the form of human faces. We may add that al-

though the BALUBA have occasionally created authentic masterpieces (such as the famous Tervuren *Kabila*), their production is rarely on such a high level. In the works of recent times, a decadence is clearly noticeable. On the contrary, BALUBA art, by reason of its classical tendency and its traditional technique, retains today, in its most usual applications, the pleasing qualities of an ingenuous grace and an innate style.

The BALUBA are keen agriculturists. Torday also calls them the most musical of all Negroes and wonderful story-tellers. Many cargoes of BALUBA slaves were brought over to the New World and their descendants are innumerable in the United States. <sup>(43)</sup>

The BASONGE tribe that lives in the present Congolese province of Luluabourg, and is influenced by the BALUBA culture, is renowned for the stylized masks that were called *Kifwebe*, according to the first scholars who described them. <sup>(44)</sup> The black painted face of the mask is traced with parallel or rather, with concentric lines, which follow the contour of the features. The real name of this mask, according to Dr. Waldecker, is *Kya Lubilo*, and it personifies speed: the bearer being supposed to use it as a kind of *magic carpet*, or as the *Tetramund* of the Wagnerian tetralogy. <sup>(45)</sup>

The very finest specimen is to be found in Philadelphia, in the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. Its perfect stylization of a noble and thoughtful human type calls to mind the best achievements of archaic Greece. Here, we are no longer confronted

Reception of Queen Djinga Bandi by the Portuguese governor of Angola, from an illustration in Cavazzi's *Istoria Descrizione dei Tre Regni del Congo, Matamba et Angola*, Bologna, 1687.





with the expressionistic and deeply emotional aspects of BALUBA art. The similar *Kya Lubilo* masks, carved by the BALUBA in a spheric shape, are, in spite of their monstrous appearance, less impressive and less beautiful.

The Philadelphia BASONGE mask, pervaded with a sense of majestic serenity, bears the traces of a supernatural vision. When it was worn, it must certainly have given the spectator the impression of a great spiritual power, materializing suddenly in order to bring a particular message from the invisible world to the throngs of the faithful.

The BENA-LULUA art is also connected with the BALUBA. But this tribe, adjoining the BAKUBA, has developed a quaint, eclectic sculpture, that bears many characteristics of *baroque*. The BENA-LULUA are temperamentally very different from the BASONGE. To the BALUBA they owe a realistic sense of detail, and a real gift for catching the likeness of a human being; they owe to the BAKUBA their love of ornaments and geometric patterns. Their statuettes of chiefs with pointed headdress and long elaborate beard, of mother and child, with tattooed faces, the woman's body and arms covered with tattooings and laden with necklaces and bracelets, are among the strangest ever sculptured in Africa.

The BAPENDE, the majority of whom live in the Southern part of the province of Leopoldville, between the rivers Kwilu and Loange, have produced carved figures less powerful in style and expression than those of the BAKUBA and BALUBA. But the BAPENDE have been and are up to the present day, among the most active mask carvers to be found in Africa. They produce two very different types of mask. The carved and painted wooden images worn by the dancers of the *N'Buya*, (an authentic *Commedia dell'Arte*, with its "harlequins," its pulcinellas" and "tar-taglias") have generally a mild and smiling expression: triangular in shape, with slightly bulging forehead, elongated eyes and eyelids, a small up-turned nose and graceful curved lips. Some of them are surmounted by three or four horns, probably a stylization of the BAPENDE coiffures. Others have a rectangular chin appendix, perhaps the stylization of a beard. A somewhat "macabre" figure with distorted mouth and protruding teeth also takes part in the *N'Buya* dance. All these masks are naturalistic, with a touch of humor and caricature. On the contrary, the masks worn during

the ceremonies of the circumcision are purely abstract. They are intended to scare the women and the non-initiated and to keep them away from the place where the rites are performed. The men who wear them are called *Mingangi*. The masks are made of straw, round, and have as sole feature two small cylindrical eyes. In olden times, during the period following the initiation, the boys wore the so-called comb-masks, that were fixed upside down in their hair so as to cover the face. Nowadays, these comb-masks have disappeared; the boys, returning to the village, have their body smeared with the red paste called *n'tukula*; then, they receive the small protective amulets delicately carved in ivory or in the stone of a fruit, that are suspended on a string and worn round the neck. They are commonly supposed to be tiny models of the *N'Buya* masks. We are inclined to think that they represent the same genii or personages figured in the life-size masks. Many of them, more specially the ancient specimens, are intensely expressive. However, their chief merit lies in their decorative quality.

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The BAKONGO are the direct descendants of the population of the famed Realm of the Congo. San Salvador, the capital of the Christian kings of the Congo from 1491, still exists as a borough in Portuguese Angola.

Now, the BAKONGO, whose separate tribes are: Western BAKONGO, or BAWOYO (KAKONGO), BASOLONGO (MUSERONGO), BAVILI, BAYOMBE (MAYOMBE); and Eastern BAKONGO — dwell on the shores of the ocean, the mouth of the river, the Mayombe forests and the banks of the Congo between Matadi and the Stanley Pool.

Few traces have been found of their former conversion to Christianity, although ruins of churches are still to be seen in San Salvador and a few church bells, baptismal fountains and crosses have come down to us, together with brass crucifixes and statuettes of Saint Anthony. At the end of the XIXth century, the returning missionaries were aghast to find that images of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints had descended to the level of pagan genii and were worshipped as such.

The BAKONGO are still attached to their commemorative statues and nailed-fetishes, but nowadays, their average production is rather poor and has little artistic value. However, the BAKONGO attained a peak of perfection in their ancient naturalistic sculp-

tures. Their figures of mother and child are extremely moving. A meditative and thoughtful feeling emanates from certain statues of ancestors, especially those that represent men with chin in hand, in the classical attitude of the Muse Clio, or of Michelangelo's *Pensieroso*. The BAMBOMA of the Noqui region (on the border of Angola), and the MUSERONGO tribe of the BAKONGO are the only ones in the Belgian Congo (and two of the very few in Africa), who practiced stone carving. Their statues in soft schist, mostly reproduce — with few variations due to the difference of technique — the traditional attitudes and expressions of the wooden statues, the latter being generally of recent date, owing to the destruction by mold, termites and rains of the more ancient ones. These stone statues were known to the ethnologists for several centuries; the *Pigorini Museum of Ethnology* (Rome) has four of them that used to belong to the so-called *Kircheriana*, a collection of curios established in Rome at the very end of the XVIIth century by the Jesuit Father Kircher. The *Musée de la Vie Indigène* in Leopoldville has another one, and splendid specimens are reproduced in the works of Kjersmeier<sup>(48)</sup> and Gaffé (René Gaffé, *La Sculpture au Congo Belge*, Brussels, 1945). However, when in recent years, Robert Verly brought back about a hundred and ten of these statues, mostly found by him in the *Omanene* or cemeteries of chiefs, hidden on the mountain-tops of the region of Noqui, his discovery was deemed a very important one. According to Mr. Verly, the statues were not funeral monuments, but rather *Mintadi*, i.e. guardian-images that would replace the chief during his absence, and were placed later on his tomb or on the grave of his successors.

The BAKONGO statues, carved in wood or sculptured in soft stone, are probably the only African works treated in a realistically carnal manner. The supernatural qualities and the spirituality that strike us in nearly every Negro carving are absent from the BAKONGO figures. They are definitely earth-bound, some of them emphasizing a feeling of human despair and promethean grandeur, others the voluptuous complacency of their creators. It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for this exception. The fact that these people lived on the banks of the gigantic river, and in the vicinity of the ocean, may have something to do with it. For centuries, the BAKONGO have had contact with many a foreign nation, both European and African. They have known men of different races and creeds, and have probably developed that kind of eclectic cul-

ture, together with a certain religious scepticism and a propensity for sensuousness, that characterized — on a higher level of civilization — the sea-born states of Tyre and Sidon in Biblical days, or the Chan-Chan and Parakas republics in ancient Peru, or even Venice during the later Middle Ages.

In the province of Leopoldville, we also find the BATEKE, whose principal abode is in French Equatorial Africa, in the district of the Moyen Congo. In spite of little technical knowledge, the BATEKE's commemorative figures are often deeply expressive.

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In 1568, according to Pigafetta, the king of the Congo asked Portugal's help against the Jaga invaders. As we already know, the struggle went on for nearly two hundred years and the realm of the Congo was finally overwhelmed. The conquerors settled in the country and their descendants are known today as the BAYAKA. For many years they jealously kept up their ancestral customs, and were very reluctant to let the white people enter into their secrets. However, on May 11, 1927, the Belgian Jesuit Father Plancquaert was able to witness the *Mukanda* (initiation rite). He has described the costumes of monkey-skin worn by the masked dancers, who also had clusters of small bells tied to their legs. Their masks were in the shape of huge funnels upside down, surmounted by feather pennants. Of the two masked officiants, one impersonated a male spirit, the other a female. It was this male spirit, the *Kakunga*, who wore what was probably the largest mask to be found in the Congo. It was about three feet high, with bloated cheeks and distorted features, rendered more terrifying by thick locks of raffia fibre, representing hair and beard.<sup>(46)</sup>

During the parleys with other tribes, the BAYAKA envoys held before their eyes a quaint, long-handled wooden mask, with a caricatural face, inscribed in a painted circle and adorned with a huge turned-up nose. Although it is difficult to find a correct interpretation of this strange object, some say it aims to represent the beak of the *calao* bird, shaped by nature in this curious way.

\* \* \*

The BATSHIOKO, or CHOKWE, or VATCHIVOKWE, a very prolific people scattered throughout the Southern region of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, are mainly hunters and warriors. For centuries they were part of the LUNDA empire and endured the domination of its ruler, the *Muata-Yanvo*, who



was still one of Africa's mightiest potentates when Livingstone visited him on April 3rd, 1854. Finally the BATSHIOKO revolted and in 1887 completely destroyed this long established power. However, the *Muata-Yanvo* or *Muat-Yanv* still has his court near Kapanga (Western Katanga), in the district of Sandoa, and shares his much reduced power with his sister, the *Nambas*, according to the tradition that confers upon that lady the prerogatives of a spiritual and religious chief.

Prof. Olbrechts considers both BATSHIOKO and LUNDA works as included in the great production of BALUBA art of which they constitute a substyle. However, BATSHIOKO sculpture especially remains very distinct and recognizable from any other.

We have already described the carved thrones of the BATSHIOKO chiefs. But these works of a recent period are decidedly inferior to the ancient statues of this people, unforgettable in their violent, snarling, animal-like attitudes. Their claw-like hands and feet realistically sculptured, their gigantic headdress shaped like twisted horns, call to mind the double row of statues that horrified the Portuguese travellers, Monteiro and Gamitto, during their visit to the court of the *Cazembe*, in the remote land of Lake Moero, where LUNDA influence prevailed.<sup>(47)</sup>

Even if the statues carved by the BATSHIOKO of today do not reflect the artistic value of the past, their decorative art delights us still: canes, spoons, baskets, and above all the high combs with sculptured figures that bear a strange resemblance to the Scythian golden objects found in Kertch (Crimea).

BATSHIOKO masks are characterized by a dramatic, sometimes fierce expression. Two of the most remarkable masks are those called *Tshihongo* and *Tshikusa*, the former with its huge black head dress shaped as a medieval helmet, the latter surmounted by a conical bonnet. The features are blotted out in a diabolical blur, and nothing remain but two dilated and erratic eyes. The *Tshihongo* mask is worn by the master of ceremonies during the circumcision rites. The *Mwan Pwo* mask, with the features of a young woman, has a milder and more human expression. It is worn by men, along with a curiously woven costume that has built-in breasts.

\* \* \*

As we advance toward the eastern and northern parts of

the Belgian Congo, we find little interest in the plastic arts among the pastoral peoples of these regions. The Hamite tribes in the Ruanda-Urundi territories have beautiful songs, dances and music, but little or no sculpture.

The masks of the WAREGA (BALEGA) (province of Bukavu) would be worthy of a lengthy study. They are used only by the members of the *Mwami* secret society. They are generally carved in ivory (elephants were formerly numerous in the region inhabited by the BALEGA). An expression of serenity and calm is reflected in the impassive features of these masks. The patina of the ancient ivory renders these delicate masterpieces, a miracle of craftsmanship and material perfection, still more beautiful. However, they are totally different from any other mask to be found in the Belgian Congo, having nothing in common with the traditional creative forms of Bantu Negro cultures. It was *contemplation*, and not *ecstasy*, that inspired their creators.

In the province of Stanleyville, the MANGBETU are perhaps the only tribe of the Congo to manufacture original pottery. Their earthenware bowls in the form of heads with the particular high coiffure of the tribe, show according to Mr. Kjersmeier, an Egyptian-Sudanese influence.<sup>(48)</sup>

To preserve honey, which is an important part of their nourishment, the MANGBETU make curious boxes out of the bark of trees, adorned with graceful, decorative heads.

\* \* \*

"It is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that is interesting: it is its plastic qualities," writes James Johnson Sweeney.<sup>(49)</sup> In these plastic qualities lies the secret of all Negro art: "the unfailing ability to conceive of style," as Robert Goldwater puts it. It is probable that the impossibility of fixing human thoughts in written words has developed these astounding gifts for style in plastic expression. But it may be also that these very gifts have kept the Negroes from inventing a writing of their own. All the aspirations of their soul, all they wished to remember from the past and the dead, all they feared from the unknown world and from unaccountable events, all this is faithfully mirrored in their plastic creation.

"Negro art is the most purely spiritual art we know of," wrote Roger Fry. "It aims at expressing one thing only, the vital essence of man. To the Negro, plastic art is not a means of en-

joying the free exercise of the spirit as we do. For that he turns to music and to dance. But he chooses from appearances certain almost abstract plastic themes, and builds out of them a consistent rhythmical system. By means which seem to escape our comprehension, the miracle of an intense inner life is achieved." (50)

Negro art may be religious, social or familial in its essence. It may be, as Georges Hardy thinks, more realistic and lifelike among peoples that dwell in dense and obscure forests, while it becomes more rigid, hieratic and motionless in regions of plains and savannahs. (51) It may charm a critic of our days by the exquisiteness of its quality: "Touch one of these African figures," writes Mr. Clive Bell, "and it will remind you of the rarest Chinese porcelain." (52)

Be that as it may, Negro art is born from the two elementary feelings that animate mankind: love and fear.

It has found a rich emotional source in the love of the departed, in the ethnical communion which perpetuates the virtues of the ancestors and in the bonds of the secret societies that unite their members in a self-sacrificing friendship.

In the fear of the genii that symbolize the forces of nature, in the fear of the magic powers that surround the frail existence of man, woman and child in the depth of the jungle, Negro art has developed into a metaphysical affirmation. It has given to the panic-stricken peoples, by purely plastic means, the liberation of ecstasy. Love, fear, ecstasy shall never be estranged from the heart of man.

### III

It is generally admitted that the discovery of Negro art and its beauty is the find of the *Fauve* painters in Paris. In fact, Maurice de Vlaminck in his boisterous book of memoirs, *Tournant Dangereux*, tells us that on seeing two negro statues behind the counter of a *bistro*, among the bottles of Picon and Vermouth, he bought them. This took place around 1904. Mr. Goldwater, in bringing this fact to our attention in his excellent book, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1936), perpetuates this anecdote.

Assuredly, Maurice de Vlaminck, like André Derain, Henri Matisse, and somewhat later, Braque and Picasso, were attracted

by Negro art. Matisse and Picasso were the first to collect these objects, whereas Vlaminck was drawn to these statues by their strangeness and curiosity, rather than by their qualities as works of art, as Mr. Goldwater recognizes. (1)

At that time, European ethnological museums (particularly the Paris Trocadéro), already possessed very fine collections of African sculptures, some of them the very best quality.

During the following years, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, the art dealer Paul Guillaume and some early collectors, like M. de Golubew, realized more clearly the aesthetic value of Negro achievements.

Those objects found by the *Fauves* in the most unexpected places were, for the greater part, second rate.

On the other hand, we find few traces of the direct influence of Negro sculptures in the *Fauve* canvases, except perhaps in those of Derain. Curiously enough, with the rise of Cubism around 1910, we see no evidence of any knowledge of the Cameroun masks and statues, in such close unconscious relationship with the researches of these artists. (2)

Why was it that these young painters attached such importance to African art? This interest goes much deeper than the casual find of a Parisian *coterie*.

It is certain that during the first years of the XXth century, the conflict between collectivity and personality weighed heavily on the artist. In this epoch, more than any other, art served as a weapon of defense for the artist's individuality. Hence the "defensive" character of so many works of art of those days: they are refuges, shelters for both the creator and his followers. Modern art in its entirety has sprung from such a scission of the personality.

The impressionists, despite their continuous struggle against the academic taste of the ruling classes, belong decidedly to the *bourgeoisie*, and their greatest masterpieces exalted the sensuous pastimes and the lighthearted pleasures of the middle-class (the bar of the *Folies-Bergère*, the picnic on the lawn, the rowers' lunch, etc.). With the increasing pressure of collectivity into the artists' field, the painters in an effort to preserve their personality, sought a refuge in the secret of their own art. Gone were the portrayal



of suburban mirth and innocent voluptuousness. Gauguin fled to virgin islands of the South Seas; the aristocratic Toulouse-Lautrec plunged deeply into the underworld; the solitary Odilon Redon retired into a dreamland of books and flowers. Cézanne, father of our century, in his shining solitude of Provence, opened wide the doors of the future, through which were to pass both *Fauves* and Cubists.

The new generation was to go still further, not in its withdrawal from society or civilized life, but rather in the shielding of its personality.

Carl Einstein attributes to this psychological process the origin of Cubism.<sup>(3)</sup> And we can ascribe to the same cause the attraction of European artists towards children's drawings, works by a self-taught genius such as Henri Rousseau, and lastly towards Negro and Oceanian art.

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The direct influence of African statues and masks is felt in the pictures Picasso painted between the years 1906 and 1909. The most famous of these is *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which hangs today in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

It is not our intention to analyze or to explain the character of this influence. We leave it to the reader to compare and to draw his own conclusions concerning Picasso's Negro period and the models that may have been his inspiration. This applies to other modern artists who have been subjected to similar influences. We find these artists everywhere: among painters and sculptors, in Paris and in Germany, in Belgium and in Austria. In the *Ecole de Paris*, Derain, Modigliani, Léger and Rouault are among the most striking examples. And again Picasso, in whose stupendous developments the features of BALUBA and Ivory Coast masks pass like Ariadne's thread.

In Belgium, the first masks brought from the Congo, in the early nineties, greatly impressed the foremost Belgian artist, James Ensor.<sup>(4)</sup> In his still-lives, where masks mingle with shells and porcelain, he creates a grotesque synthesis which combines the elements of both Flemish carnival and Negro ceremonial masks.

In the works of the Flemish expressionists Permeke, Frits van den Berghe, Desmet and Tytgat, many resemblances with Negro sculptors may be traced.

The German group of the *Blaue Reiter* (Kandinsky, Marc, etc.), that flourished in Munich in 1912, felt greatly the influence of primitivism of all kinds, including Negro art. But it is the Swiss-born Paul Klee who was most inspired by Negro masks and objects.

The sculptors, of course, were soon to become aware of the rich material that was brought to them by Negro art. Lipschitz, Henri Laurens, Zadkine and Modigliani, in his rare but splendid sculptures, show us that they have understood the lessons of the Ivory Coast, Gabun and Congo sculptors.

What is the precise nature of this influence? This is not easy to answer. A determined influence, that is, a tendency to imitate this or that type of Negro sculpture, is limited to very few cases: Picasso's Negro period (1906-1909), and some of Klee's fantastic personages or animals. But besides such direct and evident influence, many other traces of Negro craftsmanship can be found, more or less assimilated and enshrouded within the technique of modern painters and sculptors.

In the XXth century, Negro art has become a factor that cannot be ignored any more than Romanesque sculpture or Byzantine mosaics.

We will endeavor to enumerate some of the most striking processes that the contemporary artists have borrowed from Negro technique:

- 1) the treatment of the human face; the simplification of the features, reduced to essential lines exaggerating the eyes, and uniting eyelids and nose in one curved or broken element. (Rouault, Léger, Permeke, Tytgat).
- 2) the construction of the face in which the nose is a volume in itself, distinct from the rest of the composition, such as we see in a famous Picasso portrait entitled: *la femme au nez en quart-de-brie*.
- 3) the adoption of the *perspective descendante* of which we have already spoken in connection with the appearance of the human body as in many of Giorgio de'Chirico's seated figures.
- 4) the use of purely decorative designs out of which a powerfully realistic image emerges; this is the technique cur-

rently employed by Paul Klee; it is directly inspired by the *Kya Lubilo* masks of the BASONGE.

- 5) finally, another source of inspiration is found in the towering ornate coiffures and headdresses of Negro masks, (particularly the BAYAKA, BATSHIOKO and modern BAKUBA specimens): we find a happy interpretation of these towering masks in Frits van den Berghe's canvas *Un beau mariage*, as well as in many canvases by Wifredo Lam and Matta.

All that precedes is a pure application of technique. Except in the case of Klee or Lam, the inner spirit that pervades Negro art is absent from the modern paintings we have cited.

The upheaval that the advent of Surrealism created in the art of our time has in reality brought the contemporary artist very close to the Negro sculptor of yore.

The trends of our age aim at the *restoration of magic values*.

Disgusted with positivistic and evolutionistic explanations of the world that have led to huge social and national catastrophes, deceived by a science, a wisdom, an art that were imprisoned by the bonds of reason and were thus unable to attain a transcendental reality, the artists have sought refuge in the irrational fields of the subconscious, the prenatal memories, the world of dreams, the survivals of ancestral customs, the automatic and instinctive activity of the spirit. In these same fields the primitive statues and masks came to live. This is the cause of the conjunction between the modern artists and the aboriginal craftsmen that still dwelt a few centuries ago in the Equatorial Forest of Africa.

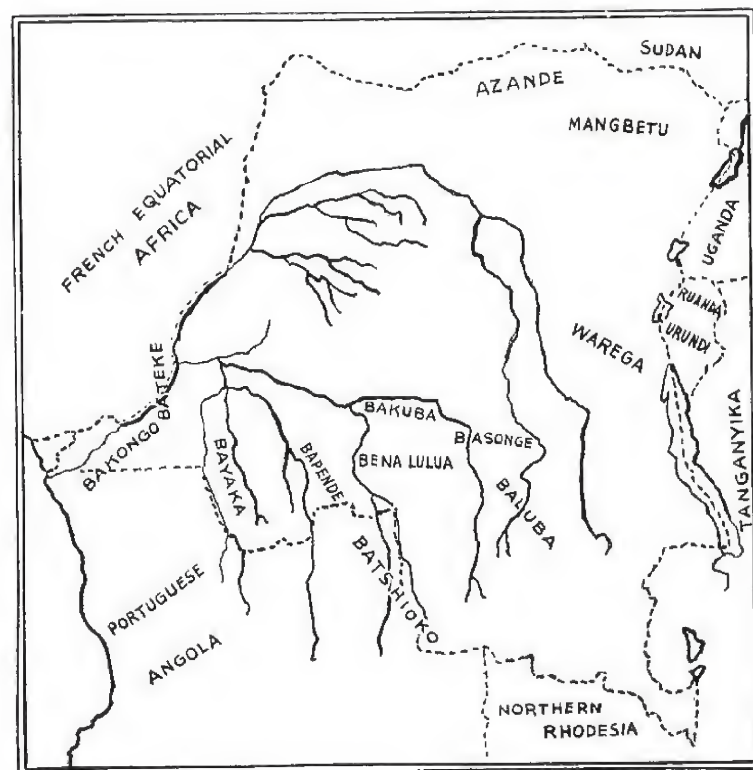
We must not forget that the masterpieces of African art belong to the past. However, the techniques acquired through a long tradition have not been lost. <sup>(5)</sup> In the field of decorative art, exquisite and quaint objects are still produced.

In the words of the Belgian writer Albert Maurice, the ancient specimens of African art after losing their magic significance, will serve as models to the native artists of generations to come. <sup>(6)</sup>

Whether or not the African peoples will one day find their way back to the creative grandeur of their forefathers, is shrouded in the mysteries of the future.

The "burden of the white man" does not consist only in bringing welfare, education and social tranquillity to those who, sixty years ago, were still sacrificing thousands of human victims to the spirits of their deceased rulers.

In the antique soul of the African races, the spiritual wealth so deeply ingrained must blossom anew. Then, and then only will they retrace their steps towards creative ecstasy.





## POSTSCRIPT

By J. M. Jadot

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of the Native Arts and Crafts.)*

It is not without interest to recall some of the steps which the Belgian Government has taken to support Congolese artists and craftsmen. The objective of its efforts in this field is to make them participate, without prejudice to their own culture, in a world civilization, in which the different cultures of mankind will be integrated.

During the last fifty years, the Belgian Government's interest in the Congo's plastic arts has not been limited to that of an art collector or a museum expert. That is how it was in the days of the Congo Free State, from 1885 till 1908. Around 1897, the first curator of the Tervuren Congo Museum was more puzzled by the strangeness of Negro art objects than ready to admire their expressive quality. In fact, he had the audacity to call them "magots" (apes).

His immediate successors began to look at them with the open mind and subtle insight of the ethnographer, and later of the ethnologist. Today, Belgian interest in Negro art is far more lively and active than it was in the days before Belgium took over the administration of the Congo in 1908.

In the first place, our ethnographers and ethnologists, guided by the humanistic and social motives of the Mother Country which wants "to rule only in order to serve" (P. Ryckmans), have focused their studies of the Congolese ethnical past on what still has vital and lasting value for the future. This has brought them closer to an understanding with art lovers and artists, and so they are now indulging less than before in those professional squabbles which Mr. Kochnitzky so much deplors. They have recognized that Negro art, like everything else in African Negro culture, unavoidably combines economic, social, political, spiritual and, above all, religious elements. They have realized that the only reason why there is so little to learn from the history of this art, is the fact that the primitive Africans had no written language in which to record it for future generations.

But that is not the full story. Around 1921, Belgian writers and artists began to take up the defense of Negro art, in a selfless and active spirit.

In January 1935, as a result of an intervention in the Belgian Chamber by the late Louis Piérard, the Minister of Colonies created a permanent Commission for the protection of the native arts and crafts of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi. Since then this Commission has made constant efforts to promote the local conservation of the artistic heritage of the Congolese tribes. It has supported the establishment of an educational system based on respect for the natives' particular temperament and artistic qualities. In the same spirit, studios and workshops for native artists have been created. Municipal, provincial and local museums have been founded. They enable working artists to remain in direct touch with the artistic achievements of their ancestors. Finally, sale counters have been established which promote the authentic products of native artists and craftsmen. By introducing a sharp control on the quality of the art products offered for sale, these counters have done much to insure markets and outlets, which make artists feel that their effort pays.

The first chairman of the Commission was the former Minister of Arts and Sciences, Jules Destrée, founder of the Belgian Royal Academy of French Language and Literature. He was an orator and writer, as well as an outstanding art lover and critic. His successors were H. Postiaux, Honorary Governor of the Colonies, Louis Piérard, journalist, author, art critic and member of the Belgian Parliament, and the writer of the present note.

Under these successive chairmen, the Commission has continued to take an interest in the development of every aspect of the artistic life of the Congolese peoples. In its advisory capacity it helps the authorities, which frequently consult the Commission, and in some cases it takes the initiative in proposing steps which it believes to be its duty to suggest. It also sponsored numerous public events and exhibitions that are likely to advance the interests of native artists. Its efforts have contributed to the creation of prizes to reward the best among them. In 1950, it published an illustrated luxury edition of a book on native arts, as a mark of confidence in its rebirth and future development (*L'Art nègre du Congo Belge*, 200 pages in-16, with illustrations, Brussels, Copami, 1950).

This brief survey of the activities of the Commission shows that the Belgian attitude towards Congolese Negro art is now beyond the stage of a distant relation between ethnologists and art lovers. Today this art is seen again in the right perspective, as

a realistic and spiritual product of an original culture. This in itself is a heartening result.

Of course, the Commission's interests and endeavors are not limited to the promotion of Negro art, which is studied in this volume by Leon Kochnitzky. It has taken a very lively interest in the recent discovery of rupestral engravings and mural drawings of real value, pointing to the almost spontaneous birth and sudden advent of the art of painting. A group of self-trained painters has unexpectedly come to the fore, and we have already witnessed the first efforts of Belgian artists to support them. The book published by the Commission contains an article by Mr. A. Scohy on the problems facing Congolese painting today.

The Commission also takes an interest in native literature. As there was no written language, this has been purely oral in the past. For centuries it has inspired the African clans, tribes and kingdoms. The Commission has supported the first native efforts in written literature, which inevitably entail the participation of the Congolese in the movement of ideas of the 20th century, in which all human beings are brought more closely together by the modern means of communication and mass media.

Without giving up the idea of achieving a harmonious combination of their ancestral culture and the Western culture to which we have introduced them, the more advanced of the young African writers want to recapture the spirit of the former, as a means of increasing their self-confidence in their exchanges with us. Also in this respect, the Congo Free State and the Belgian Administration have done their best to save the Sudanese, Nilotic, Hamitic and Bantu arts from oblivion.

We could fill a booklet of this size solely with the bibliography of the numerous masterpieces of Congolese oral art recorded by the Christian missionaries, by ethnographers, linguists, folklore specialists, and even by fiction writers, and which were published in a large number of papers, reviews, magazines, reports to various academies and books.

Unfortunately, the men who took an interest in the spoken literature of Equatorial Africa were not in a position to record them in full, with all the shades in tonology of the various dialects, whose importance was first pointed out by the Commission in 1935. In those days the necessary equipment was not available, and there were very few specialists in tonology, this unusual branch of native linguistic studies.



**BAKUBA KING BOPE PELENGE** — British Museum, LONDON. The emblem of this reign (c. 1800) was the anvil and bellows. This statue belongs to the oldest type, inspired by the image of *Shamba Bolongongo* (c. 1620).





**BAKUBA KING MIKOPE MBULA** (c. 1820) — Belgian Congo Royal Museum Tervuren-Brussels. The small feminine figure at the foot of the statue represents the slave that, contrary to established laws, Mikope married.

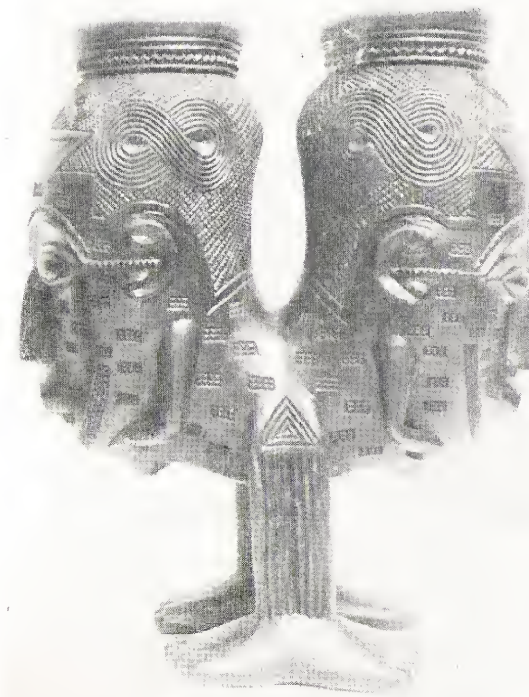


**BAKUPA KING KWETE PESHANGA** (c. 1907) — National Museum, Copenhagen. The modern carver has yielded to a naturalistic trend.



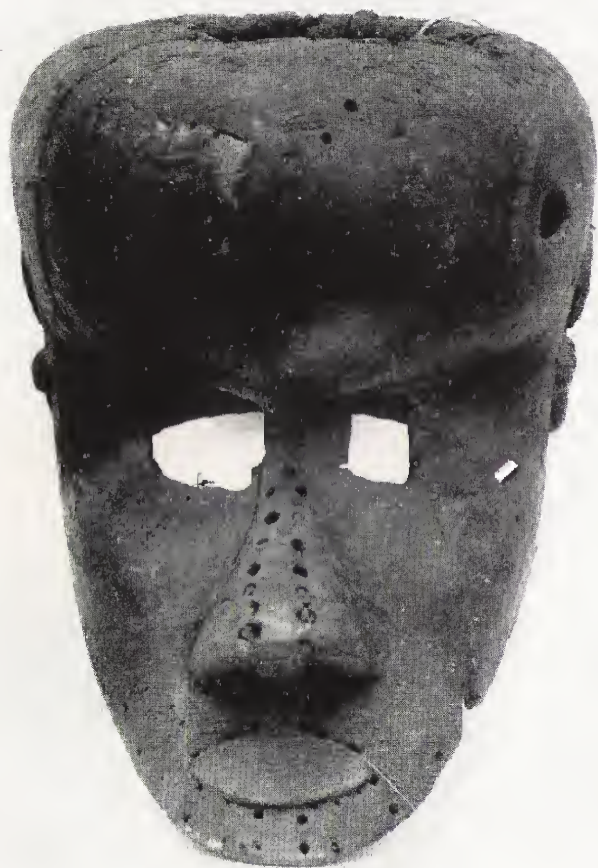


**BAKUBA HEADCUP** — Property of Dr. J. P. Chapin, NEW YORK. Cups and goblets in the form of a human head are sometimes executed in a conventional style which almost excludes any likeness to a living being, as in the specimen shown above, and sometimes in a dramatically realistic way, as illustrated by the goblet on the following page (lower right).



**BAKUBA CUP, JANUS CUP and HEADCUP** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. The BAKUBA decorative patterns have been established for many generations. Some are geometrically set in triangle and lozenge mosaics. Others, such as the headdress represented on the Janus cup, are an imitation of basketwork.





**BOMBO MASK — BAKUBA** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. This mask, with its characteristic bulging forehead, is the stylization of Pygmy heads.



**BOMBO MASK — BAKUBA** — Newark Museum, Newark, N. J. A more elaborate and probably more recent version of the Bombo mask. This specimen is adorned with white and colored beads, also with cauries.





**BAKUBA MASK** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. The geometrical pattern with triangles of alternate colors and the decorative headdress contribute to the peaceful expression of this mask.



**BAKUBA DRUM and SYMBOLIC HANDS** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. Hands carved on goblets, drums and other objects are supposed to be the emblem of the YOLO caste, a secret military organization of the BAKUBA tribe.





BALUBA FIGURE BEARING A BOWL USED IN DIVINATORY ART, known as **THE BEGGARWOMAN** —Belgian Congo Royal Museum. TERVUREN-BRUSSELS. This fine achievement of African art is not a unique specimen of its style and perfection. At least nine more plastic works that bear technical and somatic resemblances to this statue have been identified and grouped under the denomination **LONG FACE BULL STYLE**, named from the village of Buli on the river Luslaba (Congo), where two of them were found.



BALUBA FIGURE BEARING A BOWL USED IN DIVINATORY ART — University Museum, PHILADELPHIA, Pa. Another specimen, also deeply moving, of the "beggarwoman" type.





**BALUBA CARYATIDE SUPPORTING A STOOL** —Belgian Congo Royal Museum. Tervuren-Brussels. This type of caryatide is generally carved in an emotional style very akin to modern expressionism. The suggestion has been made that it might impersonate a female ancestor of the family, holding the throne reserved for the chief.

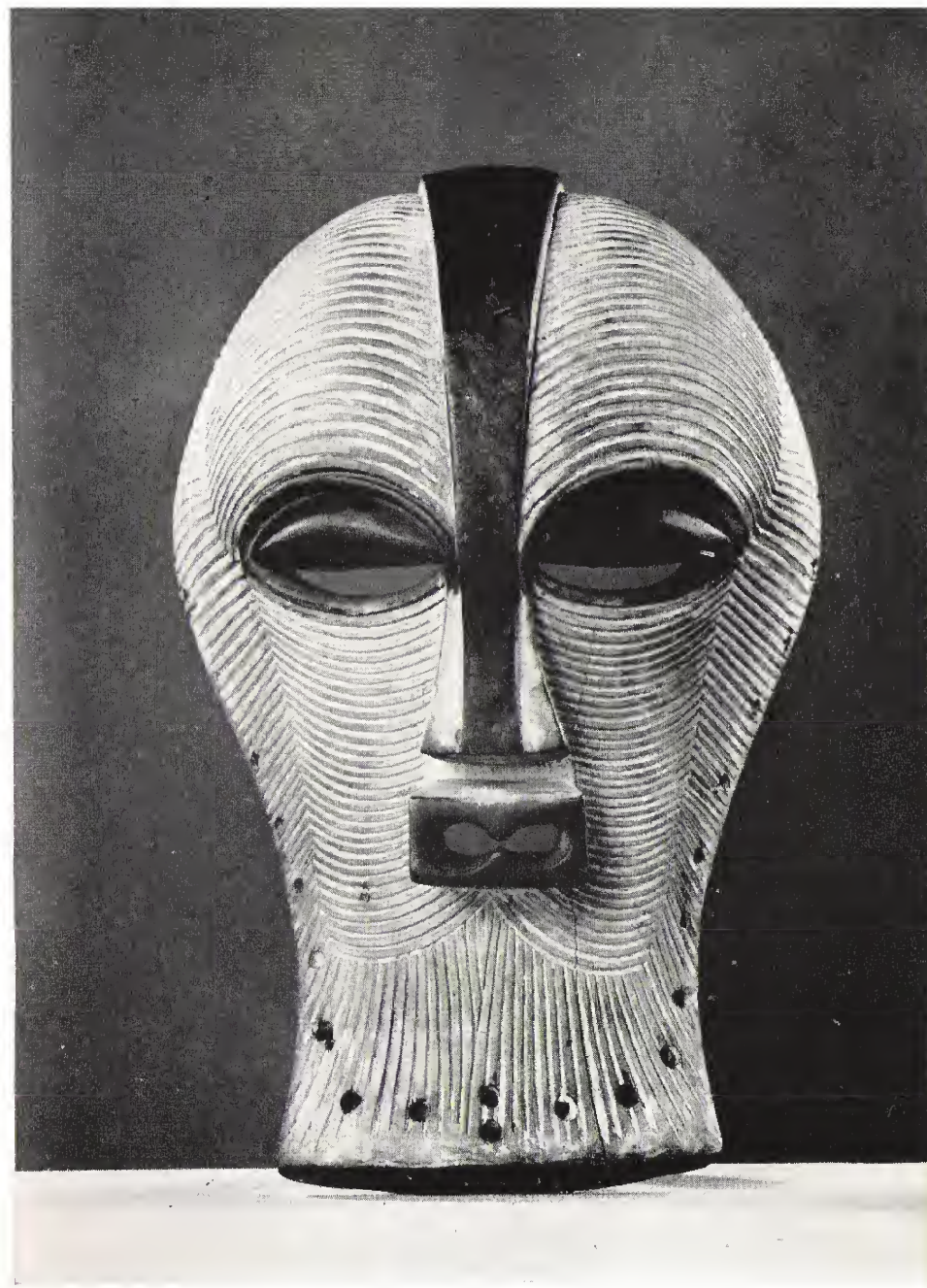


**BALUBA CARYATIDE SUPPORTING A STOOL** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. In this specimen, the accent is placed on the rich pattern of tattooing, a reminder of the family's aristocracy.





**KYÄ LUBILO MASK OF THE BALUBA** — University Museum, PHILADELPHIA, Pa. This mask with its heavy caricatural features could have served as inspiration for the modern painter Paul Klee, in one of his ironical portraits.



**KYÄ LUBILO MASK OF THE BASONGE (BALUBA)** — University Museum, PHILADELPHIA, Pa. The BASONGE tribe influenced by BALUBA culture created this highly stylized type of mask. The above specimen suggests feelings of artistic grandeur that evoke archaic and even classical Greece.





BENA-LULUA ANCESTOR STATUE — Collection of C. E. Stillman, New York.

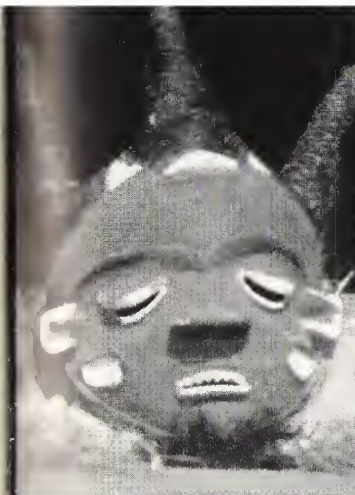


BENA-LULUA WARRIOR, MOTHER AND CHILD — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. The abundance of ornamental detail and the fantasy of the tattooing confer a somewhat baroque character on the quaint statuettes of this tribe.





**BAPENDE IVORY AMULETS** — Upper piece in Coll. C. G. Seligman, OXFORD. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, New York. Lower pieces in Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. These protective amulets were suspended on a string and worn around the neck. Some of them are very expressive.



*Photo Giraud d'Uccle*  
**BAPENDE MASK** — Kilembe (Kwango)  
— This modern specimen compared to the one on the right, shows the persistence of traditional craftsmanship in the Kwango region.



*Photo Giraud d'Uccle*  
**A MASKED DANCER OF THE N'BUYA** — Kilembe (Kwango), May 1951 — (BAPENDE tribe)



**BAPENDE MASK** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. This horned mask shows macabre expressionism. The calculated distortion of the features evokes an uncanny feeling.



**BAKONGO ANCESTOR FIGURE** — Barnes Foundation, MERION, Pa. This chin-in-hand attitude, which calls to mind the antique Clio and Michelangelo's *Penseroso*, is typical of BAKONGO male statuettes. The specimen reproduced is a very ancient one.



**BAKONGO KNEELING WOMAN** — Royal Museum of Art and History, BRUSSELS. A spiritualized sensuousness is expressed in this beautiful statuette, a masterpiece of BAKONGO art.





**BAKONGO NAIL FETISH** — Brooklyn Museum, BROOKLYN, N. Y. The so-called nail-fetishes (with a hole carved in the navel to receive the magic substance) can hardly be called works of art. However, this particular specimen reproduces with excellent craftsmanship the typical features of BAKONGO statuettes.



**BAKONGO MOTHER AND CHILD**—Belgian Congo Royal Museum, TER-VUREN-BRUSSELS. The elaborate geometrical pattern of the tattooing, in contrast with the naturalistic expression of the features, reveals the various influences felt by the BAKONGO, who for several centuries had greater contact with the outside world than had other Congo tribes.





**KAKUNGA MASK** — **BAYAKA** Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. This terrifying mask with bloated cheeks and beard of raffia appears during the *Mukanda* (initiation rite).



**BAKONGO SOFT STONE STATUETTE**—Coll. Muller, Brussels Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren—Such stone specimens are much older than those carved in wood, although they belong to the same type. They are called *Mintadi*, or guardian-images, and were discovered in recent years in ancient cemeteries of chiefs, on the northern border of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola.





**BAKONGO SOFT STONE STATUETTE** (on the left)—Royal Museum of Art and History, BRUSSELS—found in the region of NOQUI; a type frequently reproduced in different districts of the Lower Congo.

**BAKONGO WOODEN STATUETTE** (on the right)—Auguste S. Gérard Collection, BRUSSELS—found in the region of MAYUMBE; a more recent version of the same attitude. (Compare also the first image on top (left) of page 80.)

**BAYAKA MASK AND HEAD-DRESS** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren - Brussels. This mask is very similar to those shown in the photo below, taken during a BAYAKA ceremony in 1947.



Photo van den Heuvel, Congopresse





**BAYAKA MASK WITH HANDLE** — Coll. Paul Chadourne, PARIS. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, New York. This strange mask, with a huge turned-up nose, was used by the BAYAKA during parleys with other tribes.



**HEAD OF BATON — BATSHIOKO** — University Museum, PHILADELPHIA, Pa. An emblem of personal power. The carved staves of chiefs found in many parts of the Congo and Portuguese Angola are among the rare manifestations of art independent of religion or rite.





**BATSHIOKO CHAIR** — Buffalo Museum of Science, BUFFALO, N. Y.  
In this ceremonial chair, the intimate story of a family seems to be related. Men, women, children and animals take part in the "carved legend."



**BATSHIOKO CHAIR** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. A carved history book, somewhat in the spirit of a XIIth century cathedral porch. The scene on the lowest part of the chair represents the arrival of white people in the jungle.





**KALELWA COSTUME, MASK AND HEADDRESS — BATSHIOKO —** Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. The KALELWA mask plays an important part in initiation rites. Nowadays it is also worn by BATSHIOKO dancers.



**BATSHIOKO TOBACCO MORTAR LID —** Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. Even in such household objects, the BATSHIOKO remain faithful to their striking traditional images of cruelty and violence.





**BATSHIOKO AND LUNDA STATUETTES** — Colonial Museum, LISBON. With their snarling, animal-like attitudes, these statuettes express the violent and tormented souls of a warrior tribe.

**BATSHIOKO COMB** —Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. The fantastic elements characteristic of early BATSHIOKO statuettes are still recognizable in this purely decorative stylization.

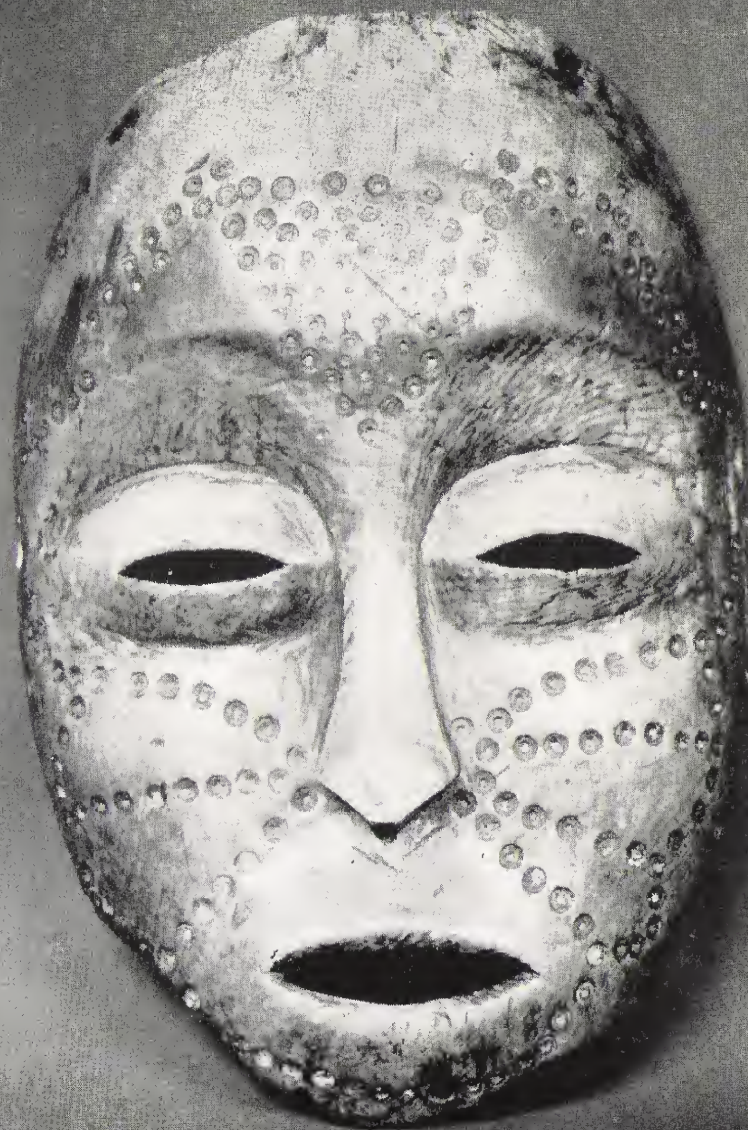


**BATSHIOKO CHAIR** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. This ceremonial chair, with its elaborate human figures, is typical of BATSHIOKO decorative art.





IVORY MASK OF THE MWAMI SECRET SOCIETY — WAREGA (BALEGA) Coll. Charles Ratton, PARIS. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, New York. This is not a work from the Far East, but a WAREGA mask. The ivory has acquired a dark brown patina that renders it very impressive.



IVORY MASK OF THE MWAMI SECRET SOCIETY — WAREGA (BALEGA) — Coll. Louis Carré, PARIS. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, New York. A masterpiece of craftsmanship. The expression of serenity and nirvana that pervades the features is unique among Congolese masks.



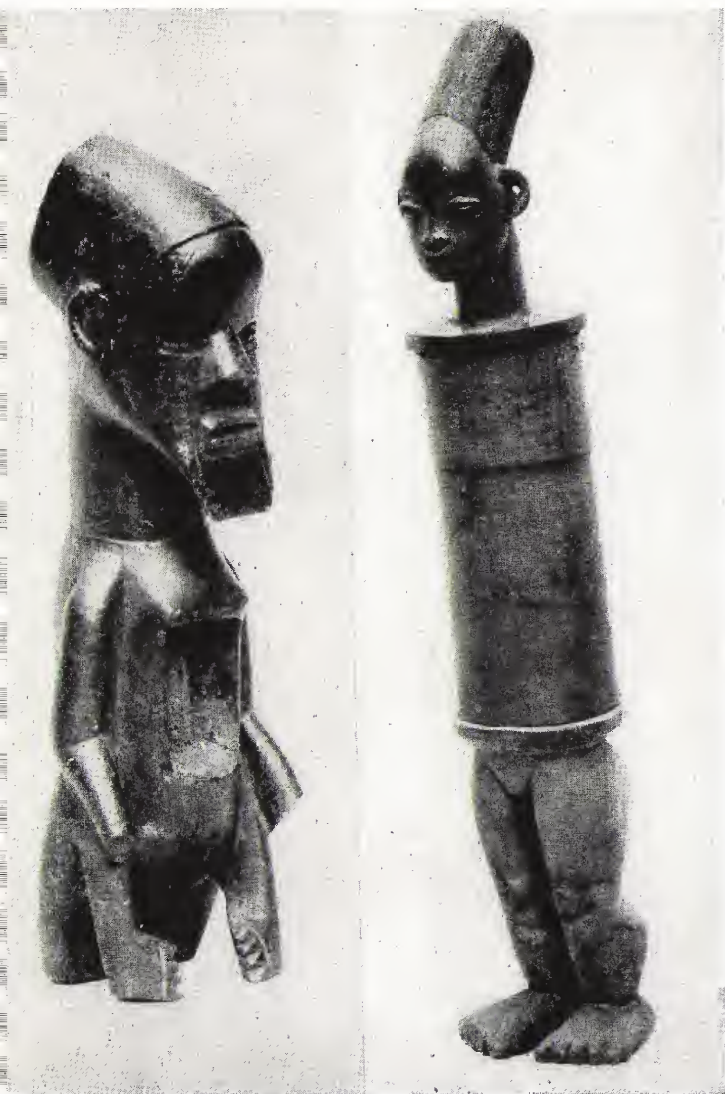


**BALEGA IVORY MASK** — Coll. Adolphe Stoclet, BRUSSELS. The features of this mask call to mind the portraits of Modigliani.



**BALEGA IVORY AMULETS** — Coll. Adolphe Stoclet, BRUSSELS. These tiny personages seem good-humored and kindly. They call to mind the Roman Lares.





**BATEKE STATUETTE; MANGBETU BOX FOR HONEY** — Belgian Congo Royal Museum, Tervuren-Brussels. These two objects come from different parts of the Congo. The BATEKE statuette is a good example of the rather primitive technique of this tribe, whereas the MANGBETU box is carved in the graceful and refined conception of this ancient people.

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### \*ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would particularly like to thank Dr. James P. Chapin, of the American Museum of Natural History, New York; M. Frans Olbrechts, Director of the Musée Royal du Congo Belge, Tervuren; Baron van der Elst, Ambassador in Rome; M. Henri Lavachery, Curator of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels; and Mr. C. H. W. Hasselriis, of the Danish Information Office, New York, for their help in the documentation of this work. He is greatly indebted to Madame Dollie Pierre Chareau for her invaluable editorial assistance.



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